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Notes on Contributors

MAUREEN HOWARD's "Facts of Life" is an excerpt from her autobiographical work of the same title, to be published by Little, Brown this fall.

The Pregnant Man, a collection of poems by ROBERT PHILLIPS, will be published by Doubleday this September.

DANIEL HOFFMAN is Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania.

DAVID WAGONER, Editor of *Poetry Northwest*, has written several books of poetry.

STEPHEN SANDY's latest book of poems is called *End of the Picaro*. This summer he is co-directing the Poetry Workshop at Bennington College.

DAVID KUBAL*, a Professor of English at California State University, Los Angeles, has written *Outside the Whale: George Orwell's Art and Politics*, and is an Associate Editor of the *Bucknell Review*.

PETER SERCHUK works for an advertising agency in Detroit and writes country music songs.

DAVID RAY's two most recent books are *Enough of Flying: Poems Inspired by Ghalib* and *The Mulberries of Mingo*, short stories.

A freelance writer, MARK PERLBERG is the author of *The Burning Field*, a book of poems.

Entering Onondaga is JOSEPH BRUCHAC's latest collection of poems.

JACK MARSHALL is a poet and fiction writer living in San Francisco.

In addition to teaching English at Princeton University, JONATHAN ARAC* has begun a study of "Rhetoric and Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction."

ROBERT BUFFINGTON* is writing the authorized biography of Allen Tate under a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship. He has published *The Equilibrist: A Study of John Crowe Ransom's Poems, 1916–1963* and numerous essays and reviews.

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Letters to the Editors

Dear Editors,

We would like to inform you of the establishment of the Poetics Institute at New York University because we think it will be of particular interest to your readers. An important objective of the Institute is to increase public awareness and appreciation of poetry, and to help improve the way it is taught.

Professor M. L. Rosenthal, the well-known poet and critic, is the Director of the Institute. With the cooperation of the English Department, he has designed the Concentration in Poetics as an option for students working toward the M.A. and Ph.D. in English. This program, which begins officially in the fall of 1978, aspires to produce teachers, critics, and scholars sensitive to the life of individual poems and able to heighten the intelligent responsiveness of students and readers.

In addition, we hope to cooperate with schools and colleges in the region in various ways, and to organize and encourage poetry readings, critical lectures, panel discussions on poetry, and the presentation of poetry on television and radio.

We should be most grateful if you would let your readers know about the Poetics Institute. We will be glad to supply additional information both to you and to them.

DIANA BENET
Assistant to the Director

New York University
New York, N.Y.

Dear Editors,

In my remarks on the sculptor and writer Carl Andre in your Spring 1978 issue ("Post-Modern and After"), I said that the $87,000 paid Mr. Andre for *Stone Field Sculpture* came from the Connecticut Treasury. It came from The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and The National Endowment for the Arts. Further, the arrangement of bricks owned by the Tate Gallery is not entitled *Lever,* as I said, but *Equivalent VIII.* And Mr. Andre was not a line brakeman on the Pennsylvania Railroad, but a yard brakeman.

GUY DAVENPORT

Lexington, Kentucky

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MAUREEN HOWARD

Facts of Life

AH, DID YOU ONCE SEE SHELLEY PLAIN," one of my mother's beloved lines, delivered on this occasion with some irony as we watched Jasper McLevy, the famed Socialist mayor of Bridgeport, climb down from his Model A. "Laugh where we must, be candid where we can," was another of her lines, a truncated couplet, one of the scraps of poems, stories, jingles that she pronounced throughout the day. Like station breaks on WICC, her quotations punctuated the hours. Vacuum off: "One thing done and that done well/is a very good thing as many can tell." Out on the back stoop to take in the thick chipped bottles of unhomogenized milk, she would study the sky over Parrott Avenue—"Tell me Clara Vere de Vere from yon blue heaven above us bent. . . ." George and mother and me, pressed against the sun parlor doors watching a September hurricane play itself out. Ash cans rattling down the drive, gutters clotted with leaves, shingles flying, the rambler rose torn from its trellis whipping the cellar door. Her gentle, inappropriate crooning: "Who has seen the wind?/Neither you nor I . . . But when the trees bow down their heads. . . ."

My mother was a lady, soft-spoken, refined, alas, she was fey, fragmented. I do not know if it was always so, but when we were growing up, broken off bits of art is what we got, a touch here and there. A Lhembruck nude clipped out of *Art News* tacked in the pantry, a green pop-eyed Sienese Madonna folded in the Fannie Farmer Cookbook. She was sturdy when we were children, with high cheekbones and red hair, like a chunky Katharine Hepburn, so the fragility, the impression of fragility was all in her manner, her voice. Her attitude towards anything as specific as a pile of laundry was detached, amused. It might not be our dirty socks and underwear that she dealt with at all, but one of our picture books or a plate of cinnamon toast. As she grew older her fine red hair faded to yellow, then to white, but it was still drawn back from her face and pinned at the neck as she wore it in college. Her clothes were old but very good. And my mother—the least independent of

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women—always used her maiden name, her married name tacked on as though she was listing herself in her *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*. Loretta Burns Kearns. Somewhat wistful. You do remember me? Loretta Burns.

I sensed that my mother was a misfit from the first days when, dressed in a linen hat and pearls, she walked me out around the block. She was too fine for the working-class neighborhood that surrounded us. "Flower in the crannied wall/I pluck you out of the crannies." Down Parrott Avenue around to French Street we marched, taking the air—"As I was going up the stair/I met a man who wasn't there./He wasn't there again today. . . ." I never knew when I was growing up whether my mother didn't have time to finish the poems what with the constant cooking, cleaning, washing, or whether this was all there was, these remnants left in her head.

To the crowded A & P we charged on a Saturday morning—ours not to make reply, ours not to reason why, ours but to do and die. If she gave us a ride back to school after lunch and the scent of spring was heavy over the schoolyard fence as the nuns filed in from the convent, my mother would sing out to us, triumphant behind the wheel of the old brown Auburn: "Come down to Kew in lilac-time. . . . And there they say, when dawn is high and all the world's a blaze of sky. . . . Come down to Kew in lilac-time. (It isn't far from London!)"

"There once was a molicepan who met a bumble stum. . . ." A witless ditty—it must have been hilarious in her public speaking class at college and never failed to please at lunch or dinner. But it wasn't mere nonsense or chestnuts from the laureates she quoted. My mother had studied German and I believe been quite a serious student before life caught up with her. "*So lang man strebt, ist man erlöst,*" she said. As long as man strives he is saved. "*Wer eilet so späet—durch Nacht und Wind?*" We were treated to disjointed lines, lots of *Faust,* some Schiller and Heine, the final watery gurglings of the Rhine maidens and, of course, "*Freude, schöner Götterfunken . . .*"

It sounded beautiful gibberish to me as did the Latin verbs she conjugated to the remote pluperfect tense, but for my mother it was to prove that she could still do it, could reel it off with ease—as naturally as an athlete doing push-ups before the flab sets in. "Amāveram, amāveras, amāverat." That was the trick my mother could do and other mothers couldn't, as well as smock my dresses by hand and overcook the meat to please my father and not speak

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to George when he was rotten, but be elegantly wounded, disappointed in her son, like a grieving queen.

She kept a plain brown copybook to mark down all our childhood diseases and achievements. This chronicle is of no general interest: while it is gratifying for me to know that I went to the World's Fair in 1939 with the last scabs of my chicken pox and still had a wonderful time, it is terrifying to read my first poem (age seven) about the Baby Jesus and George's loathsome moral verse (age six)—both efforts already corrupted by the worst literary traditions. "Thus should a little child be merry/In snowy, blowy January."

We were dressed in our Sunday best and taken to the concert series of Klein Memorial Hall. My father wouldn't go near the stuff. Helen Traubel stomped onto the stage in a black tent and something like gym shoes. The Budapest Quartet, all young and buoyant, stunned us with the knowledge of their own brilliance. The Connecticut Symphony ground out their Debussy and Ravel, their sloppy Beethoven, their inevitable Gershwin jolly-up. Me and my mother and George, proud and rather excited by the grandeur we could pull off in Bridgeport. The audience—a sprinkling of local music teachers, a solid core of middle-class Jewish shopkeepers and professionals who were more sophisticated than the Irish in town, and that set of rich old ladies who stumble into concert halls all over the world, canes and diamonds, hearing aids, rumpled velvet evening capes from long ago.

We never made it to Kew where all the world's a blaze of sky, but to the first little temple of civic culture, the Klein Memorial out near Bassick High School beyond the Cadillac showroom. On those special nights we were there. The price of the tickets was something awful, but my mother wanted this for us. I ran off pictures in my head, beautiful scenery, lakes and rills, mountains and fens. I called upon the great myth that one *must* be moved. I strained, while the violins soared, for deeper finer thoughts, but it was beyond my childish endurance. I tap, tap, tapped my patent leather pump into my brother's ankle until it drove him mad, found that I had to cough, begged to go to the water fountain and was kept in my seat by a Smith Brothers' cough drop from my mother's purse.

What did it mean to her? Was my mother full of a passionate yearning like those starved women of taste who carted their pianos across the prairie? God knows, Bridgeport was raw land in the Thirties. Before my father died, she sat in perfect harmony with

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him in front of the Lawrence Welk show. She was lost in the old sappy songs, lost. Walled in by her vagueness, all the fragments of herself floating like the million orange, green and purple dots that formed the absurd image, the bobbing head of the lisping bandmaster. My parents took my anger as a joke. Disgust swelled from me: I was not ready for compassion.

Or did Loretta Burns know that her chance was gone and only want those ineffable finer things for me and George? Well, we sure got them. We got the whole culture kit beyond her wildest dreams. There came a day when George knew who was dancing what role in which ballet that very evening up at City Center. For the pure clean line of a particular *Apollo* he would leave his gray basement on St. Mark's Place—burnt out pots, ravioli eaten cold from the can, grit in the typewriter keys. His coffee-stained translations from the Spanish and Greek littered the floor. No closets. No bathtub. Now, as an adult, my brother takes with him wherever he lives an intentional chaos that is impressive, a mock poverty. Orange crates and real Picassos. Thousands of records and books but no dishes, no curtains. Money handled like trash. Twenty-dollar bills crumbled in ashtrays, checks left to age, income tax ignored. He is quite successful really. Her boy has become a strange man, but not to himself and he is not unhappy. My brother, a middle-aged man, can come to visit (filthy jeans and Brooks Brothers blazer) take William Carlos Williams off the shelf and read a passage, rediscovered: "At our age the imagination across the sorry facts"—then tell me why it is wonderful, and it *is* wonderful. We are grown: now I can see the poem perfectly. As we talk beneath my Greenwich Village skylight he threads his speech with lines—like our mother, of course.

While I'm split, split right down the middle, all sensibility one day, raging at the vulgarities that are packaged as art, the self-promotion everywhere, the inflated reputations. In such a mood I am unable to sit in a theater or pick up a recently written book. I am quite crazy as I begin to read in stupefying rotation—*Anna Karenina, Bleak House, Persuasion, Dubliners, St. Mawr, Tender Is the Night, The Wings of the Dove.* I play the Chopin Mazurkas until the needle wears out. Drawings are the only works I can bear to look at. The atmosphere I demand is so rarefied it is stale and I know it.

Then again, everything is acceptable to me. In an orgy I view the

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slickest movie or love story on TV, suck in the transistor music and thrill to the glossy photographs of sumptuous salads and stews, the magnificent bedrooms and marble baths in *House and Garden*. Our great living junk art. The Golden Arches of McDonald's rise, glorious across the landscape, contempo-monolithic, simple in concept as Stonehenge if we could but see it. Then the nausea overtakes me in Bloomingdale's "art gallery" or as I listen to all that Limey Drah-ma on Public Television. Sick. I am often sick of art.

It would never have occurred to my mother that the finer things might be complicated for us, less than sheer delight. She simply stopped after her children left home. There were no more disembodied lines, not even the favorite "Little Orphan Annie's come to our house to stay," or "Where are you going young fellow my lad/On this glittering morning in May?/I'm going to join the colors, Dad. . . . No. She settled into Lawrence Welk, "Double Jeopardy," Dean Martin no less, and she had all her life been such a lady. She read the *Bridgeport Post* and clipped the columns of some quack who had many an uplift remedy for arthritis and heart disease. She followed the news of the Kennedys in *McCall's* magazine, until the last terrible years when she was widowed, when the blood circulated fitfully to her cold fingers and her brain. Then, from a corner of her dwindling world, she resurrected Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* in a German translation and underlined in a new ballpoint pen the proclamations of Rebecca West, all that heroic bunkum about the future, the strength of women, and her festering spiritual love.

Mother sat on the brown velvet couch day after day, rejecting tapioca and Jell-O, smiling at the pictures in her art books like a child. . . such pretty flowers. . . all the colors. . . by some Dutchman. . . in a bouquet. The fat ladies she laughed at were Renoir's, bare bottoms by a hazy stream. Her mind skipped the shallow waters of her past like a stone. George and her own father were one man. My father—her great love whom she had married against all opposition—now, my father was merely "that fellow" and there was a photo she found of Loretta Burns with a whole band of robust Smith girls, each one warmly recalled, who'd gone hiking up Mount Tom on a fine autumn day in her sophomore year. Sometimes she could not place me and so she entertained me graciously, gave me pieces of crust and cake. She was tiny now, nestled in the couch. Her thoughts fluttered away from her: "By the shores of

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Gitche Gume/By the shining Big-Sea-Water," she said. Gaily she'd recite her most cherished lines of Heine:

Ich weiss nicht was soll est bedeuten
Das ich so trauriq bin? . . .

What does it mean that I am so sad? She seemed happy to remember the words at all.

My Life in Art

"Oh, the Irish," my mother patronized her own. Too much love and exasperation was learned at her knee: the Irish—the whole insufferable lot of them—crass, low in their tastes but what could you really say against them—crooked politicians and venal priests, alcoholic virgins tottering to Mass. They were charming. We were taught to take the Irish lightly. In our house high seriousness was never the order of the day.

As kids in grammar school we said—"Well, that's the Irish"—when the nuns sent us home with books of chances on the Buick sedan, when the new Stations of the Cross were more lurid than the old. Later, when I came as a visitor to town I presumed at once that it was some thick mick mayor, true to form, who had destroyed the Victorian Gothic mansion, a dream of grandeur set in a vast garden on Golden Hill Street. I've come across that house, the Wheeler Mansion, in books on American architecture. The Metropolitan Museum took slides of every room before it was leveled. Bridgeport, a vaudeville joke of a town, had little and it opted for less. None of this seemed funny anymore: the arrogance of the mayor's sleazy taste, the hatred it implied of our meager heritage, his disdain for the duped Yankee millionaire who'd left his prize home to the citizens of Bridgeport. True, many of the fine houses in Ireland were burned to the ground after 1916—the wrath of those people, getting back their own—but the vengeance here was petty, trashed down by the Republican City Council. It was 1958. Joe McCarthy was still a great favorite of *The Bridgeport Post*. Who needed professors from out of town taking notes on an old house? Who needed gargoyles and turrets, pictures, rugs, copper beeches with a hundred years' growth? The Wheeler land was to stand empty for years, a useless punishment to the town. After my diatribe against the Irish my father said: "The new mayor is Italian."

This only increased my fury. "Well then," I cried, "it's Bridgeport, pure Bridgeport."

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Our family was alone in the parish, mocking the world we came from—the tap routines and accordion music on St. Patrick's night, the *Catholic Messenger* with its simpering parables of sacrifice, its weekly photos of saintly missionaries and their flock of mocha children with souls like ours, rescued for eternity. My parents were good Catholics and never meant us to find our religion absurd. It was as perfect to them as to any knee-bobbing, bead-telling spinster. The Catholic Church with its foreshortened American history and tangled puritanical roots was as inviolate to my mother and father as it was to the last ditch aristocrats of Evelyn Waugh.

Mass, Communion, fish on Fridays, the Legion of Decency, were all part of our life. The Holy Days were honored. Belief without question: observation without piety. Once during Lent—it must have been after a scalding sermon condemning our wanton modern pleasures, so few in the Thirties (radio programs, a Saturday matinee, an evening of cards)—we knelt together in the living room and attempted the family rosary. My father, playing up his role, intoning the Aves as he'd learned them in the seminary, mother backing him in a whisper, George and me mumbling after. By the time we got up from the floor, stiff with embarrassment, we all knew that charade would never be repeated. But we set out the cręche with solemnity at Christmas and the week before Easter the palms were dutifully carried home from church and wound round the finial of the dresser mirror to gather dust. Religion was a serious business, but the Irish were fair game. In laughing at them we laughed at ourselves, didn't we, Catholics in good standing, pure potato famine Irish, gone fine with our cut glass and linens from McCutcheon's.

Our piano lessons, taught by Sister Mary Patronella, a large woman who dosed with Listerine so that she might breathe freely over her pupils, cost fifty cents an hour and were not worth the price. Then ballet for me—elocution, clarinet for George—none of my mother's efforts to spring us from our cultural poverty or the dim children in our neighborhood came to much. She found extraordinary people to widen our horizons. A distraught mother (with a house full of waifs in undershirts gnawing at pieces of Bond Bread) instructed us in drawing and watercolors. Shading, outline, perspective: the point of each academic exercise was lost in the woman's confusion: our studio her kitchen table, old jelly jars to dip our brushes, chipped saucers to mix our colors and her kids

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whining in the doorway. For a while our Saturday mornings were a penance.

There followed, for me, a vivid year of modern dance. Only imagine the heroics of it: a tiny Jewish girl in her twenties, tense as a young bird, dedicated to Art, operating out of a storefront behind venetian blinds. A few potted plants, photos of Isadora, Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis piously tacked on the walls. Through her gauze drapery Miss Weinstein was all bone and dancer's muscle. Her body was covered for Bridgeport, though sometimes when the mothers had gone off—they were not allowed to attend class with their clumpy purses and absurdly disguised shapes—sometimes, our teacher would fling off her kimono and reveal herself to us, free and naked under her Grecian dress, leaping, swaying around the shop for her small audience. We felt the walls thrust out beyond the dry cleaners next door. The stamped tin ceiling arched heavenward into the insurance office above. Here was perfect space; and the phonograph playing away. Her breasts were like small muscles, too. Her buttocks and stomach flat. We were to believe the human body was beautiful: Miss Weinstein made it so, her neck tendons stretched to the sublime. The idea was alien to me. My arms and legs and all the mysteries between were called a temple of the Holy Ghost. All the nuns' warnings—never to see, never to touch. Each spring one sad warped Sister of Saint Joseph fashioned rosettes of lace handkerchieves and near to hysteria instructed us girls in adorning the collars of our school dresses that we might detract any wicked eye from the flat stretch of our bosoms. For the school play we had undressed with large white towels held in our teeth, covering out shame. Then came the modern dance. Ruby Weinstein was ridiculous in her abandon, but the ten preadolescent girls in her class never snickered. Nipples and navels were reasonable in the atmosphere she created. I'd never seen pubic hair, but it was quite the right thing on Miss Weinstein as she danced for us.

In our home-sewn togas we expressed ourselves, leaping (as though against the wind), swaying (branches in spring), falling (in death to the cold floor). There was no technique at all, save the perfect imitation of our teacher. There was no critique, no one student singled out for grace or elevation of style. The only choreographed piece, which we danced finally and disastrously for our mothers, was performed to the "Narcissus Song." We rushed from the corners of the store to a round 1930's mirror set on the floor, fell in love with our respective images, tossed our heads, sighed, leapt,

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swayed, fell to the contemplation of our beauty again and expired, all ten of us, by the side of the reflecting pool.

At home I played my own record of "Narcissus" when "they" were out. I dashed from the sun parlor to the center of the living room carpet timing each move, the coy little testing of the water with my toe, the flirtatious smile. There was no mirror needed. The true narcissism of adolescence lay a few years ahead: the self-enchantment of my dancing was enough. Imagined away the plumpness and pigtails. Turned to dust my colorless school clothes. Fantasies in an empty house. It was the beginning of my long career as an escape artist. Secrecy was important. No one on the block, no one at St. Patrick's School should know that I studied the modern dance. I was the only Christian in Miss Weinstein's class, and though the girls were friendly I was content to go off alone in the car with my mother. I did not want art confused with real life. The dread ballet classes of former years had been an ordeal—all the little daughters of doctors and dentists, *socialites* from Fairfield in squirrel coats and Tyrolean skirts, the heiress of a girdle empire escorted by a black maid.

No, what Ruby Weinstein offered was pure. Art. Freedom. I had come to know in my childish way these grand abstractions. Grace and Beauty. All written on the blossoming soul with an indiscriminate use of capital letters. Such inflation seems horrifying to me now. I have no clear idea what freedom is and grace belongs to children, to one perfect stroke, or to the talented who put in a lifetime of hard work. So I leapt out of Ruby's corner with my illusions on the afternoon of our spring recital to adore myself, pink toga and pigtails, but I was Narcissus no more. They laughed. The mothers, squeezed back against the shop window in a line of folding chairs, swapped smiles and laughed, not cruelly but with a sweet indulgence. We were little girls again, consigned to another clumsy step in our advance toward the womanly state. Someday we would have purses and hats, hateful permanent waves and face powder soiling the collars of our print dresses. We would sit in a row like vegetable women, amused by art, wondering if there was enough in the house for supper. End of the record. I died by the side of the pool.

Polite applause, the scraping of chairs and then Miss Weinstein sprang forth wearing underclothes beneath her gauze, decent this day. To urgent unknown music she danced for them, danced against them. Her strong small body became a force: the sequence

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of leaps, back falls, contractions, spun from her endlessly, like magic scarves. The little studio was charged with her conviction. She was not afraid to expose herself: this was her Art. She danced till the end of the old seventy-eight and danced beyond to silence. Yes, her performance had a manic energy, was routine artsy, but Ruby's dedication was the real thing. Stunned by such beauty I went straight to my dreams again, while the mothers, bewildered, but with full respect clapped and clapped. There was a sudden intimacy in the storefront studio—"It's meant so much." "Next year, Miss Weinstein," they said, "in the fall." We stood by the jars of lilacs she had placed on the window shelf for our final meeting. There was no next year. Ruby Weinstein was passing through Bridgeport.

In the car my mother called me by a pet name. "You were very good, Mimi." That was untrue. She had laughed with the rest. There was no comfort in the old name. I remember this moment and others like it when she would draw away as though the years to come were accomplished and she had lost control of me. "How will it turn out for you?" she seemed to say. Then in a soothing voice she went back, back further to the nursery rhyme that was always mine—"Reeney-Pen-Pone/Lived all alone." I was her strange, fat child, wounded, clutching my toga in a brown paper bag. She had done her best.

The Attitudes

George began to stutter: "B-b-bread, p-please," and "p-pass, the b-b-butter." My brother was such a bright articulate boy any dodo would have known that the sudden blubbering plosives were a cry for attention. He must have been nine or ten years old. Though I was eighteen months younger I knew the game he played. He would keep it up—the b-bread, the b-butter and the p-p-potatoes until my mother's anxious solicitations drove my father to curse George out: "Christ Almighty, can't you talk? What the hell is this?" He would ask the question but my father never cared for an answer other than his own: George was ruining dinner, making a fool of himself. How many times had we heard that one of the supreme skills in life was being able to speak out clearly, even eloquently, to address the world grandly, as my father addressed the Kiwanis and Rotary clubs, as the lawyers (those much admired rich and clever men) argued their cases down at the courthouse?

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And here was his son blithering out of the b-blue. Today any half-wit child psychologist could tell us that a little boy with all A's and "Annoys others. A great distraction!" written in the nun's precise hand on the back of his report card was b-bored out of his mind.

It was a crisis and though I hated every meal I was in awe of George's persistence. At the table he could keep the stutter going like a twitch, then wash it right out of his mouth when he played with Mark Gilday and Dick Ferucci.

"Speak slowly," my mother said, always in there trying. "Think of each word, George." But soon Jesus would be invoked again and the plates would dance at our places as my father struck a blow at weakness and irregularity. Since they didn't want to know all about us (Freud had not filtered down to our self-reliant American family), the burden was on my mother, as usual, to make things right. She found a Mrs. Holton: George was to go for speech lessons, though my mother let us know at once that this lady's abilities were not geared to anything so mundane as curing a boy's bumbling conversation.

In one morning she had discovered the finest woman in Bridgeport, too fine for us she implied somewhat crossly. Oh, her children were already ruined, she knew, by the coarseness of our neighborhood. A rough, dirty blanket covered the whole North End. There was no one with any more idea in his head than running up to the Rialto for a double feature. How she hoped that if Mrs. Holton could take George in hand. . . . He lasted two lessons, the only boy, made a sissy, waiting for one little girl to come out of her parlor and another one there to giggle at him when he was through. It was easier to abandon the stutter, so I was slipped into his place as an afterthought. Like his melton coat and school shoes passed down to me, I came by my brother's elocution lessons secondhand. My mother must have been pleased that at least one child of hers would be exposed to the art and manner of Mrs. Holton.

Today I can't read a poem out loud that my family doesn't ridicule me. They groan and titter. They intone a line after me with false resonance. No one ever, ever reads like that, they say, deep from the chest like a Barrymore. They claim it's not *me*. La-dee-dah they make my reading sound and I'll be damned if it is—for it's perfectly natural. It *is* me—the tone held up at the end of a line, the elisions and glides, the glottal softening, the hitch of caeusra in my voice. Funny, of course, if you've heard nothing but the flat crackle of television voices, thin as cheap beer, clinging to the microphone

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for dear life. Hurt and proud, I draw into my memories. A posture I hate at all other times seems justified: how can my daughter know, poor impoverished child with her crush on the golden movie idol of the moment—he of the starched mouth and droning masculinity? How can my common-sensical husband understand, a midwestern kid, the twang of his St. Louis relatives in his ears? How can either of them hear the fine points of my elocution voice, trained weekly by Mrs. Holton?

It must have been the heyday of the Emerson School of Speech and Dramatic Art when Louise Holton was a student in the Nineties. The photographs on her dining room sideboard were discreet: a stately brunet in the full-length portrait carried her head high with billowing pompadour, pearl choker on a long arched throat, pretty arms, a rose in hand. White muslin draped gracefully to the floor from the lacy exaggerated bosom of the day. Simplicity itself. The toe of one satin slipper indicated a positive stance. Nothing so transient as a smile on her face, the young lady gazed steadily ahead with an ethereal softness, capturing in her look some old idea of beauty. There was spirituality and competence at once in the gentle angle of the head. The world that this studio photo of young Mrs. Holton suggested was so far removed from mine that I never believed in it. It was dream stuff, like the drawings of beautiful ladies I found on the old sheet music in the seat of my grandmother's piano bench—"The Last Rose of Summer," "Come Down, Come Down My Evenin' Star." Another photograph featured a group of girls all costumed for a theatrical romp—Shakespeare I presumed even then—and my Mrs. Holton with arms akimbo, bold as you please in tights, had placed one foot jauntily up on a tree stump. They looked a deadly bunch, faking the hearty fun of it all, their performance captured in mud tones forever. Behind the bric-a-brac of a silver plate there was one more half-hidden photo, not quite admitted to the everyday world, of a girl about my age with golden pipe curls and a wreath of roses on her head for some artistic event. This was the Holton's dead daughter, Ruth, I'm sure of that, but God knows in the gentility of that dining room how I ever learned it outright. I was fascinated by the glint of her perfect teeth, the crisp ringlets of hair at her temples . . . a child my age, dead. This sweet and satisfactory girl was infinitely more deserving of life than me—that's how I thought of her—and I

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stared at her photo hard and long the few times Mrs. Holton left the room.

That lifeless house where I presented myself each week after school—the whole somber feel and smell of it is with me still, the details more readily available than the arrangements of houses I have recently lived in . . . the hall with the hideous umbrella vase, art pottery of 1910, the brown scrub brush mat to wipe my feet on, the toppledy coatrack that held its arms out invitingly and then slipped my coats and sweaters to the floor. A high table at the dining room window held waxy houseplants that seemed never to grow or bloom over the years. The scent of brown laundry soap rose from the freshly ironed cloth on the dining room table where we began my lesson. Everything in place and clean, no excess of matchbooks or rubble of dusty pennies from coat pockets, no tattered magazines, not even last night's *Post* folded out of the way. Nothing had happened here or ever would. Mrs. Holton's pupils came and went in a hush. *Mr.* Holton, on the early factory shift, came home from work, stole in the door and creaked up the back stairway. I encountered him once in the upper hall when I needed to go to the toilet so urgently that I finally asked permission to tiptoe up to the immaculate bathroom. There he stood, a lean Yankee the color of tallow soap. He wore his factory identification tag on the pocket of his blue workshirt and black lace-up boots. He did not speak.

Herbert Holton was a foreman at Jenkins Valve, an engineer in better days who had come down from Massachusetts to get work. Of course Louise Holton was not from *Bridgeport*, that, my mother pointed out, was easy to tell. Though she was loyal to our "Park City" my mother had some fix on Boston that we got a dose of now and then—the finesse, the delicacy of Bostonians made us all look like boors. Even the Boston Irish (she was so ignorant of the world) were better than the breed at home. So off I went to Mrs. Holton, who *was* Boston and culture, that I might acquire the clear rich speech and poise of a lady. Herbert came home. The stairs creaked. My teacher's voice rang through her modest house with the assurance of a grande dame, "Good afternoon, Herbert!" The brightness of her greeting was always met with silence, and brighter still she turned back to our lesson.

A, E, I, O, U. We slid the vowels up, then down. We trilled them and shot them like spitballs at the walls, in unison, then on my

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own. I advanced to the more difficult roller-coaster effects, A, E, I, O, U—taking each vowel in death-defying swoops. Next, we addressed ourselves to those troublesome consonants, the D's and T's, spraying them lightly across the table, moving on to the plosives, those B's and P's George had picked to taunt us. All warmed up we let the vocal chords rest, closed our exercise books and went through the open arch to the living room. There we faced each other across the carpet—Mrs. Holton, a corseted full figure in her dark afternoon dress, her fluffy white hair pinned up in a modified pompadour, powdery white arms and neck, high color in her cheeks that even a child would not mistake for rouge. I was short for my age with plump legs encased in the brown lisle stockings prescribed for all pure Catholic girls. My usual school dress was a muted plaid to minimize my round tummy and each morning my mother finished me off with glossy fat braids. We swung our arms up and around. We bent from the middle (neither teacher nor student had a discernible waist) and lolled our heads round and round to loosen up before we began The Attitudes.

When I was first out of college, learning to hold my liquor and trying to enchant the world, I used to *do* The Attitudes at parties. Most anyone could sing old songs, but my skill in pantomime was acknowledged as special and amusing, though my pick-up audiences, like my family, never believed in me. I like to think I am the only living person who can perform this lost art form. All the gestures of life boiled down, jelled to a routine and practiced first to the right side of Mrs. Holton's living room, then to the left: Calling (hand cupped to the mouth), Looking (hand over the eyes), Hearing, Greeting, Farewell, then into the deeper emotional material: Rejection, Fear, Love (both Open and Guarded variety), Laughter (head tossed, eyes dancing) and my favorite, Sorrow. Sorrow was posed with the head sagged, eyes covered with one drooping arm while the other was thrust back in limp Despair.

Week after week I mirrored the example of Louise Holton's perfect Attitudes. I could imagine her Calling Herbert to come downstairs after her pupils had departed, giving him a Farewell at the front door each morning as he went off to work with his black lunch pail, and naturally the most touching of all scenes, I envisioned her balanced in Sorrow over the photo of her dead daughter just my age. For what else could be intended but an elegant mime of life: I was to get my emotions fixed, to harness my awkward

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moments into ideal gestures and thus would my feelings be elevated to the ideal realm.

At home to irritate us all, my father sat down to dinner in his undershirt, actually the top of his BVD's. My mother might say, "Put a shirt on, Bill," but could not pursue the matter. He was perverse and crude, a man who must have his way. I was humiliated by the scene between them: his childishness—demanding ketchup and ice water, finding fault with the butter fresh from the dairy that day, thrusting his freckled hairy chest out defiantly. Her painful submission to him brought a short uneasy peace. Then he was angrier than ever and provoked a fight with me or George for not helping our mother. Couldn't we see how dragged out she was, all afternoon cooking the pot roast, baking apple pie? How many families did we think were waited on hand and foot by a blessed martyr? How many of our friends, poor kids that they were in two-family houses down the street, were eating her homemade chocolate cake? You bet your life they're eating crap off Louie's shelf your mother wouldn't feed to the dog and were they chauffeured to their lessons—clarinet, elocution and dance? For what? For us to sit at the table and be distressed—oh, it was too bad—by his undershirt? Once lathered up he could go on with great disdain about "educated" people.

George and I were miserable, choking down the chocolate cake or custard, whatever gift had been given us that day by our sainted mother; there was no easy Attitude to take. I had only the beginning of a notion when I was in grammar school of my father's delight in his own rhetoric. The next night he'd strike quite another pose—fully clothed, indeed, sporting a well-tailored suit from Fenn-Feinstein in New Haven—we'd all be taken through some intricate legal proposition that had come up at lunch in the Stratfield Hotel, or, the Latin and Greek roots of our common English words would be expounded and he would have a "sliver, darling—ah, that's not a sliver now" of our dessert. Charming and urbane, he was the most interesting father in the world and we were his radiant family. We sat late at the table and played with our crumbs. My mother's demure laugh pleased me, though of course it was not Laughter or Joy in the nobler sense as I well knew. Our passions at home were too muddled to ever be cast in the classical mode.

The tension between my father and mother must often have come

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to a head at suppertime: the mortgage, the kids, the inner knowledge that they were both meant for better things. And the other nights—the alternate mood of our family meals was as sparkling as a good scene out of a Depression comedy.

"Oh, Bill!" our mother said, time and again. "Oh, Bill!" A perpetual girl, she was never dismayed for an instant by one of his wild stories. Her role of the innocent must be displayed like a talisman for good luck. The pact that my parents had drawn up between them had so many clauses—that he should bully her, captivate her, honor her: that she should suffer his folly and respect him: all his windy force against her steady will and self-effacement.

It was the psychiatrist's inevitable suggestion to me so many years later that may father was the dominant figure.

"Oh, no," I said.

"Your mother, then?"

"There is no answer to that question."

And I still cannot find my way through their intricate contract. Looking and Listening at the dinner table was deeply troubling, yet they seemed easy exercises compared to the more heroic material I watched my parents enact—my father's raised fist of Anger or the white muslin folds and fading roses of what I believed to be my mother's Unrequited Love.

The gliding vowels and The Attitudes were most probably adapted from the old Del Sartre Method, techniques not so much for the stage as for the dead form of *tableau vivant* and the recitations expected of young ladies. The notion was far-fetched, that I would ever nestle into the curve of a grand piano at some church social or stand in a drawing room flanked by potted palms, clear my throat, take the position of Welcome, left then right, balanced just slightly over the ball of the foot. In the phantom world evoked by Mrs. Holton I did recite. There in her parlor I acted out the poems and monologues memorized during the week with fitting gestures, speaking from the diaphragm so that I might be heard in the last ghostly row of her imagined auditorium. I've lost track of all the sentimental verses that were once in my head, but some of the frisky pieces, thought appropriate for a girl my age, remain. One began: "I went to the dentist along with Aunt Nell," and reached its height of hilarity under the drill. Another featured "takeoffs" on a row of gullible hicks watching a cowboy movie. I was in great demand. I never attained the Brahmin ballroom for my stage but appeared

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often on the wood platform of St. Patrick's School built one step up from the cement floor where big spiders and bubble-gum wrappers clogged the drains. I recited beautifully whenever Monsignor Lynch came to visit, when the diocesan supervisor came down from Hartford to inspect our classes (perfect classes, presumably, since no changes were ever deemed necessary). When the parents came once a year, dressed in Sunday clothes, I recited an elevating poem and did the darling piece about the dentist as an encore. Dick Ferucci gave them "Ave Maria" on his violin. Mary Morton, a giddy girl, fumbled over the piano keys: "The Barcarolle," "Country Gardens." A few flashy types, new in the neighborhood with the defense plants' hiring, tap-danced and did acrobatic splits. We all sang "To Jesus heart all burning/With fervent love for men."

I recited at birthday parties and when company came at Christmas and Easter. "Cute" I must have been up to a certain age, insufferable. Then Mrs. Holton delved into her file cabinet and brought out yellowed sheets of paper—the great readings of English poetry and prose, all of our literature clipped and pasted up for the genteel recital. I was Puck, Richard II, Portia, Lear, Mr. Pickwick, the ghost of Christmas Past, Sir Philip Sidney, Tennyson, Matthew Arnold and, as they say, many, many more. These selections were not memorized but read off the yellowed sheets, the lines preserved in the small blurred print of an ancient typewriter. My final elocutionary triumph came in the eighth grade. I was given a dramatic monologue which I was led to understand only an individual of great talent and sensitivity could deliver. By this time I knew that in some spooky way the work Mrs. Holton entrusted to me could only have been performed by Ruth, gone from us forever with her fresh rose wreath and sickly smile. This last recitation was of the moment—the words of a British mother saying goodbye to her children as they were about to sail off to the safety of America during the war, while she stayed behind courageously, bombs soaring overhead. "Chin up, Gerald, That's mummy's boy. It's going to be such fun, the tall buildings . . . and the Statue of Liberty will be there in the harbor with her torch of freedom to welcome you. Pam, my little one, what's this . . . not tears?" Farewell (to the right), Bravery (center), Sorrow (left).

I moved myself to choking sobs in rehearsal. The nuns were thrilled. I don't feel shame now but wonder, as though it was not me at all but some other self with a pre-adolescent idea of the tragic, a puppet girl babbling a text that must have been clipped

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out of a church newsletter or a woman's magazine. A friend of mine, now a distinguished guardsman of our culture, was made to recite the Gettysburg Address when he was a boy before the entire city of Gloucester, standing out in a mist in front of the noble statue of the fisherman. Painful, funny, but his act was no more ludicrous than my version of the brave British mums waving her kids off: "It's only for a while, Pam. This frightful mess will soon be over. Write to me, darlings. No, Gerald, we must never say goodbye."

Departure was almost as good as death in this despairing war-torn world. A boy I loved moved out of town to an army base. I mooned about the house and ate . . . "Oh, my darling, be brave." I had pimples coming on and "difficult days" when I should not ride my bike or swim. Without warning there was a miraculous coming of age: I began to see the nonsense of my afternoons with Mrs. Holton and felt that I had been badly used. By this time I went freely into her neat refrigerator to get myself a glass of ice water. There at the kitchen table I saw two places laid for supper. The stage was set to unfold the steady disappointment of their lives: Louise and Herbert face each other over another silent meal.

I was humiliated by my past performances. I forced my mother to make excuses for me: it was understood that with Latin and algebra, field hockey in the afternoons at the convent school I now attended . . . There was a cool friendship of sorts that continued between the ladies, Christmas cards, infrequent phone calls. I was lectured on how lucky I was to have been "exposed" to Mrs. Holton. I saw only the ladylike speech and scrim of empty gestures that was meant to separate me from the hard realities of life. Each adolescent Love and Fear was different. I threw the Del Sartre method out as trash: my responses to my father and the games he played with us each night were unpredictable and often graceless.

This should have been the end, but a few years later, when I went to public high school, I was involved in a cheap incident that shocked my parents (the particulars hidden, fortunately, in some obscure corner of my mind). In this crisis, as with George's stutter, my mother treated the disease of my rebellion as though it were a superficial wound. Mrs. Holton was resurrected. This last effort to save me lasted only a few weeks before I declared myself one of the damned. Not elocution this time, but etiquette—an orris root and almond-water finishing process lay in store for me in the silent parlor. Herbert was dead and Mrs. Holton lived on in her perfection. She had assembled on the clean cloth of the dining room

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table, books and pamphlets from the Emerson School. A lady always carries her head high. Her beauty is enhanced if the lips be slightly parted. She sits with care. She may cross her ankles but never the knees. But all was not superficial deportment: I was to beware of the *double entendre* and its lowly offspring, the smutty story. On these unforgiveable occasions, thrown in with men of little breeding, I was to turn my head decisively away or say with stern demeanor, "I do not understand."

I was in love with an Italian boy and we walked the North End at night, kissing between street lights. His three buddies like a Mafia escort trailed half a block behind. He sang with a big band in the Ritz Ballroom at Pleasure Beach on Saturday nights but we knew my father would never in a million years let me go to a dance hall. We walked down back streets to a pizza parlor where we sat alone feeling each other under the table while his friends were posted guard in the booth behind.

Good-natured laughter is permitted in the home but is not tolerated on the street or in a public conveyance. I must subdue a gloomy mood before entering society. I must practice walking with a book balanced on my head and, above all, not afflict the world with any dismal account of my circumstances. "It is presumed," Mrs. Holton said, "that each one has trouble enough to bear without being burdened with the sorrows of others."

My boyfriend was diddling with me. He had a girl, a smouldery Italian beauty who took the secretarial course and it was presumed—each one has joy enough—that they would marry. I loved the smell of him and the strange beads of sweat that sat on the flat tip of his Sicilian nose and were brushed against my cheek when we embraced.

When I was in college Mrs. Holton died. Months before she had called my mother and asked if I might come to visit during Spring Vacation. So on a chill bright day, the forsythia improving the small front yards of Bridgeport, I drove out to the Fanny Goodwin Home for elderly ladies. Her room had the familiar photos, clean linen doilies on the tables, plants and a hot plate. We drank Nescafé. I said that her elocution lessons had served me well. I was constantly asked to speak at college meetings and I announced the Glee Club from one end of New England to another, speaking from the diaphragm, sliding my vowels, spitting my D's and T's. She offered me one of two decorative plates as a keepsake. They were

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both oriental in style and I felt that I stood in such a false position with her that I grabbed the worthless one, a turn-of-the-century Japanese thing, and left the deep blue Canton china behind. Then she gave me a grocery carton filled with all the materials of her trade—the monologues, the typewritten selections from literature and the glossy cream colored programs which memorialized those lofty evening recitals at the Emerson School. She walked down to the car with me past the old girls on the porch rocking in the sunshine and stood on the lawn, head high, lips slightly parted and affecting me with nothing more troublesome than her Pride and Unguarded Love, she bid me a classic Farewell.

I've often wished that I had that piece about the Second World War, but it's gone. When I divorced, the box was left in New Jersey—in a leaky cellar that flooded in a hurricane. I said to hell with it and the family photographs, my Smith yearbook, early manuscripts washed away too: I was getting on with my life. Of least importance was that box of Mrs. Holton's. Good riddance to the bloated eloquence of perfectly enunciated poesy, the techniques of good behavior which had not implemented my salvation. I am not the lady I was meant to be.

When my husband, my ex-husband, came to pick up our daughter for the weekend visit he said: "I'm sorry about the mess in the cellar . . . all your papers."

"It's O. K."

We stood in the doorway of my apartment with our little girl's overnight case between us while she shuffled through a shopping bag of her favorite toys. We weren't hardened to our circumstances. We dawdled and laughed a lot. He said he could not braid her hair. Finally they started on their way, but turned to look back up the flight of stairs. I stood above them on the landing, posturing, hand to heart. "Chin up. That's mummy's darling." I laughed and struck the Attitude of Bravery. "It's going to be such fun. We must never say goodbye."

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ROBERT PHILLIPS

The Stone Crab: A Love Poem

("Joe's serves approximately 1,000 pounds of crab claws each day."—Florida Gold Coast Leisure Guide)

Delicacy of warm Florida waters,
his body is undesirable. One giant claw
is his claim to fame, and we claim it,

more than once. Meat sweeter than lobster,
less dear than his life, when grown that claw
is lifted, broken off at the joint.

Multilated, the crustacean is thrown back
into the waters, back upon his own resources.
One of nature's rarities, he replaces

an entire appendage as you or I
grow a nail. (No one asks how
he survives that crabby sea with just one

claw; two-fisted menaces real as night
–mares, ten-tentacled nights cold
as fright.) In time he grows another—

meaty, magnificent as the first. And,
one astonished day, *Snap!* it too
is twigged off, the cripple dropped

back into treachery. Unlike a twig,
it sprouts again. How many losses
can he endure? . . . Well,

his shell is hard, the sea is wide.
Something vital broken off, he doesn't
nurse the wound: develops something new.

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Decks

In the fair fields of suburban
counties there are many decks—
redwood hacked from hearts
of California giants, cantilevered
over rolling waves of green
land, firm decks which do not
emulate ships which lean and list,
those wide indentured boards which
travel far, visit exotic ports of call.
No. Modern widows' walks,

these stable decks, stacked with fold-up
chairs, charcoal bags, rotogrills,
are encumbered as the Titanic's.
They echo Ahab pacing the Pequod,
the boy who stood on the burning,
Hart's jump into the heart of ice,
Noah craning for a sign, a leaf . . .
These decks are anchored to ports
and sherries which mortgaged house
–wives sip, scanning horizons,

ears cocked for that thrilling sound,
the big boats roaring home—
Riviera, Continental, Thunderbird!
Oh, one day let these sad ladies
loose moorings, lift anchor, cast
away from cinderblock foundations.
Let the houses sail down Saw Mill,
Merritt, Interstate. You will see
them by the hundreds, flying flags
with family crests, boats afloat

on hope. Wives tilt forward, figureheads.
Children, motley crew, swab the decks.
Let the fleet pass down Grand Concourse,

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make waves on Bruckner Boulevard.
Wives acknowledge crowds, lift pets.
The armada enters Broadway, continues
down to Wall. Docked, the pilgrims
search for captains of industry. When
they come, receive them well. They harbor
no hostilities. They have great gifts.

Burchfield's World

(for John I. H. Baur)

In the late great paintings of Burchfield,
all nature goes round and around!
Cornstalks jig, crickets genuflect,
clouds flap like cawing of crows. Those
wild Burchfieldian nights! The wind
is a fleet of shrouds. Disaster
explodes from church-bells' claps, tele-

graph wires all shrill. Lie still, lie still
and think about fear of the dark,
the mystery that lurks in the hearts
of trees, in the guts of all stumps
in still waters. Why is the air
so heavy with flowers tonight?
Why the cicada's nerve-music?

The night's alive with idiot eyes
of houses, a thousand wet houses
that rot. Look. Frequent the alleys
the same as boulevards. God is
what you find under a rock, God
is the face of a hollyhock
in the late great paintings of Burchfield.

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Soft and Hard

The night they came to carry you away
it was your sacroiliac, not your nerves.
Poleaxed on your bed of pain, unmoveable,
you who never took aspirin cried out
then for novocaine, codeine, anything.
Two men had to lift you onto the stretcher
in only panties and bra. Black. Blessedly opaque.

Every light in the room glared, the outside
world inside at last. I saw how it looked
to strangers: dolls, magazines, stuffed bears,
real kittens underfoot, books books everywhere:
like the Collier brothers whose Bronx home,
after they died, was stacked with every newspaper.
Had they read them? The ambulance took you,

I was left surrounded by the wreckage.
Once, younger, we ran through the park,
saw squirrels burying nuts under fallen leaves.
"I think they do that to soften, not save them,"
you said. "To make the hard shells edible."
Dear one, how hard we tried to soften all
our edges with things. And by going underground.

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DANIEL HOFFMAN

Folk Tale

It's enough to make one think they knew
Something, those old crones. At whose request
    Do they tweak baby's cheek with gnarled
Fingers? Who asked them, perched on every cradle,
To intone a blessing in their fireside cackle?
If we could only start out once without it—

Why is it that, when, as a new door opens
Toward an untried way stretching before us
    With limitless invitation, always
There's a staying hand weighs on the shoulder
The sharp restraint of that remembered blessing,
Their admonition, You'll be most nearly happy

With a box you never open. Who then
Can think of anything down the road, the windings
    Unexplored, the paths, the houses
Deep in the woods, the trees startled with birds
And all made radiant with expectancy
—Who then can think of anything save that box

Because forbidden? Now at such a time
The guests have all subsided, their bottles spent,
    The drowsy sun itself falls silent.
Then night concludes the gathering for all
Communicants save lover and beloved
Who depart for haven to fulfil

Those rites for which these steps and incantations
The others witnessed were preludial.
    At such a time a barred door
Tantalizingly can open—Now
May they recall the wisdom of the tribe
Before it is too late, before it is

Too late. Something it was about an open
Box. Or was it not to open? No matter,

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A meteor throbs, he thrusts its blaze
Into the darkness of the opening crack—
Her limbs melt, drops of tallow fall.
This is a tale that will be told again.

Himself

The one most like himself is not this mirror's
Dishonest representation
Of a familiarly strange person

Growing more crinkled around the eyes,
But one on whom he has not set his eyes,
One he knows is in this house with him.

In this very room there is
A youth he has outgrown, whose ease
With the world is greater than his own,

Whose gifts are greater than his gifts,
Whose joys are deeper joys
Than any he has known.

By the time that he began
To grow apart from that potential grace
He had barely worn its face,

His callow years were all a waste
Of foolish choices and false satisfactions.
The blessing given him at last

Across the alien years
Is that he now may judge his actions
By what that one most like himself would do

Whose ease with the world shames his unease,
Whose delight exceeds the joys he's known,
Whose gifts are greater than his own.

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DAVID WAGONER

Love Song After a Nightmare

Half listen, love, half asleep,
To the beginning of morning:
Your dream was the water,
And over its face, light air
Comes singing out of the shadows
Across a field to our house:
Birdsong and one shred
From the buried nest of the sun
Entering (dim and distant)
This room where you have spent
All you could spend on the night
And now lie empty-handed.

Your hobbled heart, heartbeaten
Through the terrible pasture,
Not led but driven
Straight to the still water
And under, now falters ashore
Out of your nightmare
Still breathing, still carrying
The burden of its proof:
You, with your fear behind you.

Though the sun may burn
Among crossed branches
At the grate of the window
Like our bodies around our bones,
Love has come back alive
To stretch its arms again:
It will need nothing more
Than what we bring together
On this, our next first day
On earth, to make its garden.

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Book Sale (Five Cents Each)

On the Salvation Army's bookshelves, the derelicts
Line up as if for coffee,
Some stuck together like doughnuts, some mumbling music
To warm up charity:
The soaked hymnals, the self-devotional memoirs
Droning Vanity, Vanity,
The loud reports from the Corporals of Industry
Now muffled by mildew,
The Rover Boys strung far Out West, blind-canyoned
By a ripped-off chapter,
And the backs of the books-of-the-month-after-month
Humped undercover,
The indigestible digests, the spiral schoolbooks
Telling and telling
What they're going to tell, then telling, now telling no one
What they told each other—
Rank after rank gone by the reviewing stand
To join this cold Army,
For hire, five cents forever, cheaper than kindling
If it comes to burning.
But *Laugh with Leacock* and *Laughing Boy* and *Memento Mori,*
All Quiet on the Western Front,
Come as you are, with dust on your riddled jackets,
Though your wounds need binding,
Oh, *Adam and Eve and Pinch Me, Beau Geste,* and *Victory,*
Come home to dinner.

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STEPHEN SANDY

Near Pamet Marsh

Nothing was there
but branches, throwing
him off the track.
The last light was going,
the sun had gone;
only the gray char
of lichened bark
and the darker swaths

of hemlock bough.
He thought, "how banal is
that exquisite
white cedar now!"
The spiked mast towered
listing beyond repair
above him, no hint
of how to get back

or where the path went. It
divided, then angled
off both ways. Which
way? He had the dark
on his hands, a faint tar
to catch the ivy laced
over the swamp tract
like a chrysalis.

One beam to home on:
the chalcedony glint
from the muskrat's eye
in a net of wet
twigs, when the strip
of cloudbank scoured

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all light from the tangled
ancient cowpaths.

There was dissension
with the night. At length
he stopped. An hour
and more he heard
the noise of space
that roared and reared
where the stars had spread
their barbed net. All

at once, the stitch
of a lamp through lampblacked
branches, the gilt-
edged beam a shred
of someone's hearth
that reached in friendship
(so it appeared)
across the quilt

of ground-pine down
to one who had faced
desolate palaces;
and found on the damp earth
a kind of bower
framing a tension
between his strength
and the waste that was.

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DAVID KUBAL

Lionel Trilling: The Mind and Its Discontents

He loves the mind, in all its modes, to trace,
And all the manners of the changing race . . .
—George Crabbe

In 1965, in the preface to Beyond Culture, Lionel Trilling admitted to being himself rather surprised by his new, heretical view of literature. He had, it seemed, performed a complete about-face. For if in his earlier criticism, he had argued that literature could free the self from a culture bent upon its containment and diminishment, he now had serious reservations concerning the power of the imagination. Not only had he been convinced that literature, and especially modern literature, provided a substantial criticism of a Philistine society, but that it also served as an antidote to simplistic liberalism and as a counterpoint to an advanced-guard pessimism. But by the Sixties he had qualified these assumptions. Indeed in *Beyond Culture* he asserted the idea, which struck at the foundation of modern aesthetics and which, as he said, "will seem disastrous to many readers," that "art does not always tell the truth or the best kind of truth and does not always point the right way, that it can even generate falsehood and habituate us to it, and that on frequent occasions, it might well be subject, in the interests of autonomy, to the scrutiny of the rational intellect."

That *Beyond Culture* represented a significant and a deeply felt change in Trilling's thought is borne out by a letter he wrote in 1966. Responding to a proposal that a literary meeting be set up around his ideas, he said that such a conference "is something I should like to think about. I'm sure it would be interesting; I'm not sure that it would be a *beneficial* experience for me—it would inevitably look backward, and perhaps put me into a position of defending or explaining what I said, and, at a time when my ideas seem to be changing, retrospect itself, and certainly an induced commitment to what retrospect discloses, might be a harmful enterprise. But I should at least consider the possible usefulness of the occa-

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sion. . . ."[1] The meeting never came about; nor did Trilling ever directly confront and explain during the last decade of his life the evolution of his ideas. Yet from *Beyond Culture* and his printed lectures, including *Sincerity and Authenticity,* "Mind in the Modern World," and "The Uncertain Future of the Humanistic Educational Ideal," which he published between 1965 and 1975, as well as from his earlier work, it is possible to adduce at least the cultural reasons behind his dramatic shift in regard to the modern aesthetic.

That altered point of view did not, as we shall see, emerge as abruptly as the preface to *Beyond Culture* might suggest. Throughout his life Trilling was intent upon establishing an autonomous, critical position from which he could interpret and judge society. And while he had found in Modernism with its commitment to the self and art a complex and liberating perspective, he began to suspect, at least as early as *The Middle of the Journey,* that its energies were waning. In fact, by the early Fifties and particularly in *The Opposing Self* he seemed to feel that the modern aesthetic had contracted a disease soon after its origins in Romanticism. So that for him, Keats's "historical importance" consisted in representing "the last image of health at the very moment when the sickness of Europe began to be apparent." Still he did not make his disaffection final until the Sixties.

At that time Trilling identified two principal reasons for Modernism's diminishment: first, it had lost the cogency of an idea itself; lost, in particular, the tension between the concept of individual will as opposed to that of necessary limit. In its various artistic manifestations, the self, in other words, was seen and affirmed as authentic only in so far as it achieved, through the negation of society and nature, an unconditioned state. It was that theme which informed Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground,* the work which anticipated, more than any other for Trilling, the final disintegration. Secondly, he explained Modernism's decline as a result of its uncritical adoption by the literary intelligentsia. In the process, its complex truths were domesticated and reduced to cant as a part of a general diatribe against the possibilities of ordinary existence. Out of that development, then, came a counter-culture or a "second environment," characterized, as he said, by "firm presuppositions, received ideas, approved attitudes, and a system of rewards and punishments," attributes shared by the dominant

[1] Unpublished letter (5–15–66) to the author.

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culture or the "first environment" which it rebelled against. Under these conditions, Trilling went on to argue, the study of literature could not be expected to accomplish what it originally set out to do: to release the self from intellectual, moral, religious, and aesthetic attitudes that circumscribed its energies. To put it another way, modern literature had been stripped of its liberating powers, those which John Stuart Mill and Edmund Gosse had drawn upon, for example, in their rebellion against their fathers. On the contrary, with a kind of religious fervor of its own, the literature of the counter-culture tended to reinforce dogmas already inculcated by education. Finding, therefore, his original perspective usurped and trivialized, Trilling developed a new adversary position *vis á vis* both environments, one which led him, with a good deal of dismay, to reconsider not only the values of Modernism, but also to question the justification of literary study itself; the defense which presumes that literature, as he said, in "The Two Environments," has a "unique effectiveness in opening the mind and illuminating it, in purging the mind of prejudices and received ideas, in making the mind free and active."

But as I have pointed out, Trilling's skepticism in *Beyond Culture* did not come without warning. From our vantage, we see his early and continual uneasiness about Modernism's tendency to nihilism and its drift toward domestication. In *The Middle of the Journey,* the character of Gifford Maxim, who derives many of his religious and political values from Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, speaks for a radical denial of life. And if his ideas are simplifications of Dostoevsky's thought and art, dismissing as they do the love and gentle compassion of Alyosha as well as Dimitri's spiritual growth, they are not unlike those of the Underground Man. By recognizing only "the world's false image of strife" without "the true image of reconciliation," and by denying the virtues of human existence, Maxim represents Modernism in its corruption. Based on an abhorrence of nature and society, his is an ideology which confers on the privileged the right to subjugate the many. In Maxim, indeed, Trilling dramatizes Modernism's disposition to authoritarianism, the apotheosis of the elect at the expense of the common and of a rigid order in the place of an open society. It is an inclination, for example, which had serious consequences in the work of D. H. Lawrence and even graver ones in the life of Ezra Pound.

In Emily Caldwell, on the other hand, we see how modern art has influenced even the ordinary and the familiar while it has been

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vulgarized in the process. At the Church bazaar, John Laskell comes upon some bowls Emily has made.:

> What aspiration was contained in the unprincipled designs of these bowls he did not know. He could see the forms of Cubism as it [sic] had been picked up from the brushes of Parisians who had dropped it two decades before, picked up by men of small intellect and less passion. He could see in the angles the embodied talk about the machine age and the beauty of the functional which had always implied angles. There was arts-and-crafts and a touch of the folk and even of the peasant, the saving myth of *hand* work. There was the deep sullen modern mysticism of the abstract and nonrepresentational, here scarcely understood. Oh, it was thoroughly not good, it was so bad and silly and derivative and yet somehow it contained so much that, though badly transmitted and ill understood, had been tried and fought for in confusion and pain and pride that it went to his heart through all the firm barriers of judgment and taste. Each of the designs was in bad taste and each, with its red and blue and its unorganized swoops of angle and curve, was deeply depressing, precisely because it denied the sunny fleshly quality of Emily's and his meeting by the river.

Like so much of the literature which Trilling saw dominating the Fifties and Sixties, Emily's bowls recall only part of the original cogency of the modern movement, and that only half-understood. They are redundant copies, pale and jejune statements without coherence or depth.

Yet in the Thirties and in Emily's hand, the bowls retain enough force to point Laskell to a truth he requires, to call into question, in effect, the orthodoxy of his own time, the liberalism of the Crooms. Later in the novel, after he buys one of the bowls and at the end of the summer, he contemplates his purchase:

> Especially in the light of the lamps, it seemed, with its heavy colors, to be very dark in its conception. He did not know what part of Emily Caldwell had given it this character, for, although it synposized in some uncomprehending way so much of the recent art of the Western world, it must also have some particularlity of the individual who had made it. In his knowledge of Emily, Laskell had never seen in her anything that he could think of as the source of this unhappy design in which, although the intention had been to show the angles and curves moving at their freest, there was something claustral and desperate. There were, it seemed, depths below the bright humanistic surface that he did not know about, except as the bowl now suggested them. . . . Now, looking at the bowl she had painted, he saw her deep awareness of nullity, her knowledge of darkness. He no longer saw the ineptness of the design, but only what it suddenly and darkly spoke of.

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By embodying in a personal way the imagination of disaster, the truth of which has been borne out by the events of the novel, Emily's bowl, "the sad monument of his summer," remains for Laskell a symbolic reminder of what is missing from the Crooms's sanguine liberalism, the faith which had once defined him.

As the novel finally suggests, however, the Crooms's day with its "bright humanistic surface" is just about over and an apocalyptic mentality is coming to the fore. In that environment, Emily's bowls would do little more than support the cultural ideology. It was precisely the possibility of such a situation, the end of the dialectic between art and society, which Trilling gradually became aware of in the Fifties. Referring to the contemporary literary situation in 1958, for example, he said: "It is 80 years since Dostoevsky died, and in that time his appalling perceptions have been made into the common coin of modern literature. Any number of writers of the *avant garde,* from Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett down, have appropriated some part of his vision and have been understood and approved by *Mademoiselle, Harper's Bazaar,* and *Esquire.*" In view of this state of cultural affairs, Trilling like Arnold, urged criticism to do what was necessary; to do what the imagination alone could not: to discover fresh ideas for the use of the poet who could then reinvigorate the mind and the feelings, providing alternatives to those received "truths," awakening, in effect, an unthinking and self-satisfied cultural life.

Exhortation is not, of course, a manner we associate with Trilling's prose. And, typically, his attempt during the Fifties to "urge" criticism in a new direction took the form of suggestion and example rather than of heated polemic. His style, which irritated many of his critics, was not just a strategy or simply a manner however. His choice of discourse, one that proceeded by indirection, and was marked by reticence and humor, together with a disinclination for pronouncement, accusation and invective—those attributes of Dr. Leavis's criticism, for example, which he regretted—reflected his sense of the difficulty and hardness of culture. The life of society, including that of the mind and of the imagination, based as it is on unconscious prejudice and habit, is not "stuff" which one can manipulate at will or change by fiat or argument. As he realized, moreover, it was just that kind of ignorant pride which had distinguished intellectual and political discourse during the Thirties and Forties, leading not to understand-

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ing but to bitterness and hatred. If society were to be civilized, he knew the process must be carried out in a tone and spirit of reconciliation and not of acrimony.

Similarly, Trilling was reluctant to indulge in prescription. At least in his relationship to the poet, Trilling felt, the critic should defer, because literature could not fulfill its function if it were co-opted by criticism; if it were held fast, that is, to certain techniques or concepts of reality. If that condition were achieved, either directly by commissars or in more subtle ways, the results would be the same: an art of orthodoxy, incapable of enlivening. It was for this reason that he was chagrined by the growing influence of foundations and the provisions of "chairs" for poets in the Academy. It was part of an attempt, as he saw it, to domesticate the artist, to conceive of him as the "Commissioner of Moral Sanitation" or, as he said in an even more ironic mood, an "audio-visual aid." Such plans, he believed, should be avoided, just as critics should eschew prescribing artistic ways and means. "For the purposes of the artist's salvation," he remarked in "The Situation of the American Intellectual at the Present Time," "it is best not to speak of the artist at all. It is best to think of him as crazy, foolish, inspired—as an unconditioned kind of man—and to make no provision for him until he appears in person and demands it."

The case of the literary intelligentsia was different. In the same essay Trilling wrote with passionate concern for the weakened condition of culture indicating the steps that must be taken if it were to be resuscitated and if a vital criticism were to develop. At base the problem lay, as he then saw it, with the intelligentsia themselves. For not only had an intellectual class of significnt size come into being, but it had also begun to acquire powers which it used to isolate itself and to enforce conformity within its own ranks. In short, Trilling perceived a nascent counter-culture. At the time he realized that to a large extent the formation of the new class originated out of a distaste for ordinary existence, for the conditioned life of politics and society, an attitude abstracted from Modernism. Observing the large numbers of those entering the academic life after World War II, he said, "The motives for the study of the humanities often seem to me to be those of laziness, or indecisiveness, or fear, the fear of the contamination of the brisk world, or the simple desire of prestige that has newly been attached to the profession." Once in the profession, he added, literary intellectuals, justified by a criticism that dissociated literature from

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its contexts, closed their minds to other knowledges, ignoring such disciplines as psychology, sociology, theology, and history, refusing in fact to submit themselves to any discipline save that of the disembodied text, having "difficulty in believing," as he said at another point, "that there is a significant reality to be found in anything except literature itself and a certain few moral assumptions which modern literature has made particularly its own. . . ." The literary life was becoming, in consequence and in itself, whole and entire, shut off from the larger one of the mind and militantly opposed to the dominant culture, employing as its principal weapon the notion of the poem's absolute authority. Its chief moral dogma was the concept that alienation from society, which entailed the celebration of suffering, evil and the unconditioned, together with the discrediting of ordinary pleasure and virtue, constituted a sign of spiritual prestige, a badge of the elect.

Hoping to counteract this development, which was, he felt, a tendency rather than an accomplishment at this point, Trilling changed his approach to literature. If in *The Liberal Imagination,* for example, he first reminded his readers of the intractable nature of existence, of its tragic necessities, in *The Opposing Self, A Gathering of Fugitives,* and the uncollected essays he wrote for The Readers' Subscription book club, he was preoccupied with the sense of the self's possibilities in culture. His new emphasis is precisely illustrated by a review of *A Death in the Family* where he admitted that while Agee's "inability to confront ambivalence constitutes a deficiency in [his] moral vision," it is also deserving of respect, since his "exclusive preoccupation with goodness has the effect of being a relief from the predominant preoccupation with evil and the inability to imagine virtue." Some two years later in 1960 he made much the same point when he introduced the reissue of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.* And at the same time, as if with the purpose of exemplifying his own change, Trilling reprinted his 1941 review of the original edition. In that first notice he had accused Agee of "a failure of moral realism," of "an inability to see [his characters] as anything but good." In 1960, however, he qualified the judgment, preferring to understand Agee's myopia as rather stemming from his "passionate will to deny evil . . . to affirm, if not actually believe, that the human soul could exist in a state of radical innocence which was untouched by any contrary."

In *The Opposing Self* Trilling also made the effort to identify a soul, if not possessed of a "radical innocence," at least one characterized

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by virtue achieved within the terms of ordinary existence. And if he described a self in opposition, it was one which resisted the force of any cultural idea that would undercut its familiar, human ground, that sensuous and sensual fact, which gave felicity and beauty as well as compensation for a tragic reality. If there were any hope for modern culture and literature, it lay in the revitalization of this imagination which he found, for example, so splendidly in Keats, that "last image of health . . . with his intense naturalism that took so passionate an account of the mystery of man's nature, reckoning as boldly with pleasure as with pain, giving so generous a credence to growth, development and possibility; he with his pride that so modestly, so warmly and delightedly responded to the idea of community." Still, as he concluded, "The spiritual and moral health of which [Keats] seems the image we cannot now attain by wishing for it. But we cannot attain it without wishing for it, and clearly imagining it."

Succinctly, then, for Trilling, the function of the critic, his necessary task at this particular time, was to help culture and the poet to such an imagination of health, one which was independent of any ideology, whether it be utopianism or a metaphysics of nihilism. Herein resided those "fresh" ideas which could release the poet from the deadly effects of the current orthodoxy, providing a new basis for literature, and producing, in turn, an art with the power to liberate the citizen from reductive notions of his own capabilities, enabling him, once again, to become "sentient and free." By way of critical example, in *The Opposing Self* Trilling located this moral and spiritual sustenance not only in Keats, but also in Wordsworth, Jane Austen, Tolstoy, Henry James, Howells, and Orwell, all of whom recognized in a conditioned existence, one composed of society, family, and nature, a source of pleasure, strength, and identity that is undetermined by culture, even a literary one. Trilling did not deny, of course, that individual fate is directed to a great extent by social forces. But in his essays on these writers, and in his lecture, "Freud and the Crisis of Our Culture," given in 1955, he affirmed his belief that there is a significant part of the self which remains impervious to civilization. In fact, he even found it liberating that Dickens and Flaubert, whom he also considered in *The Opposing Self,* could imagine the individual capable of a total negation of society, including the pleasures of the ordinary. Given the growing imperiousness of every cultural position, including those conceived of as adversary, any evidence of the self's autonomy, even

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that won at the cost of a radical denial, could be thought of as a kind of consolation.

Yet it was not to imaginations like Dickens' and Flaubert's which he regularly turned in the Fifties; for their ideas had been all but vitiated by the literati, and lacked, therefore, their original cogency. Besides, they did not represent what was most needed in culture at that moment. Rather it was those intelligences who had kept hold of the first impulses of Romanticism, those who were self-delighting and world-delighted, to whom Trilling gave his attention. And quite often he found that intelligence in the most unlooked-for places. Notwithstanding the major literary figures he examined in *The Opposing Self,* he frequently chose to discuss writers who were relatively minor or ignored or dismissed by the intelligentsia. For example, he introduced books by Norman Douglas, Robert Graves, David Riesman, Henry Adams, C. P. Snow, Kenneth Clark, and George Santayana for The Reader's Subscription, using the opportunity to examine the inadequacies of the literary coteries, often in the spirit of *épater le cénacle.* What elicited his admiration was the presence of a self which rejected the received concepts of cultural determinism and which uncovered felicity in the mundane, material and social world. Such a selection and approach were clearly intended to offer a critical antithesis and to suggest the necessity of enlarging the critical inquiry to include non-literary subjects.

Trilling's brief but significant essays on Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* and *Individualism Reconsidered* are to the point. Not only did Riesman represent a social science which was ignored and disparaged by the literati, but he also provided an examination of society, together with its manners and morals, that literature and criticism had apparently lost interest in. In other words he stood as a source of fresh ideas, an alternative to that which was all too uniformly accepted. Besides, like Santayana, Riesman argued for the necessity and possibility of autonomy, what he called "inner-direction," or what Trilling defined as "the pleasure of being an individual and free," as opposed to social determinism or "other direction." Yet Riesman did not hate society, nor did he accept the notion that our institutions dehumanize us; rather he viewed them, as Trilling noted, as "actually the 'glory' of a large-scale society tending toward democracy." It was his complex, "double-minded" attitude toward culture and his refusal to indulge in social despair which drew Trilling's approbation. "It is," as Trilling said, "one of his decisive intellectual virtues that he has no love for the opiate of

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pessimism. He is not charmed by apocalyptic visions." Finally, it was Riesman's passionate concern for both self-hood and civilization, which Trilling also found in Freud, Santayana, Adams, and Graves, among others, that he urged on his readers and colleagues in the Fifties, convinced that such a perspective, along with a broadening and a deepening in other knowledges outside of literature, could free the mind and, in turn, the imagination. While not without his doubts, at this time Trilling still believed that the literary mind was capable of such a fundamental conversion.

Yet when he published *Beyond Culture,* a collection of essays and lectures written with few exceptions in the Sixties, Trilling admitted to the victory of the second environment. Its entrenchment in the schools and universities, in the communications and entertainment industries, and its consequent power to control dissent, had rendered it secure against its adversaries. Safe from criticism, at least that carried on in its own terms, it had gone on to capture the literary mind, if not, as he worried, the mind in general. That phenomenon was brought home to Trilling with particular cogency in his own classroom. In his essay, "On the Teaching of Modern Literature," he recounted the response of his students to classic modern works, both in poetry and prose. What disconcerted him was that among his better students, he found neither dismay nor surprise, much less serious question, after he had confronted them with Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Conrad, Kafka, and Mann; that the judgment leveled against the citizen and his world, with all its implications of meaninglessness and disaster, had become so common that they simply, without blinking, accepted and accommodated it. As he said, "I asked them to look into the Abyss, and, both dutifully and gladly, they have looked into the Abyss, and the Abyss has greeted them with the grave courtesy of all objects of serious study, saying: 'Interesting, am I not? And *exciting,* if you consider how deep I am at my bottom. Have it well in mind that a knowledge of me contributes materially to your being whole, or well-rounded, men.' " It was only in his less gifted students that he read any kind of discomfort or protest. And if their reasons for rejecting the Abyss were not quite spiritually respectable, they nonetheless moved Trilling to a "queer respect." For, he observed, they honored the "gods of the copybook maxims . . . who make ready the way for 'the good and the beautiful' about which low-minded doubts have been raised in this course. . . ." And it was

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their wisdom that they sensed that the "good and the beautiful" was the justification of their lives. But his advanced students had, it seemed plain, learned the lessons of modern criticism well enough, absorbed those maxims which, as he said in "The Two Environments," "instructed us in an intelligent passivity before the beneficient aggression of literature. Attributing to literature virtually angelic powers, [modern criticism] has passed the word to the readers of literature that the one thing you do not do when you meet an angel is wrestle with him."

Quite clearly literature in this instance was no longer exercising the power it was felt to have: that energy which liberated the self, rendering it autonomous, placing it beyond the reach of received and prescribed ways of thinking and feeling. Nor did it even give pleasure to or enchant the self, thereby releasing it, momentarily at least, from the cruelties of the mundane, much less console it in its uncertainties and fears. It achieved, as Trilling showed, the very opposite: it diminished the ego by circumscribing and inhibiting its freedom to express itself. Nor did Trilling believe that his classroom was singular, which, of course, it was not. Nor, as he saw, was such a moribund response confined to the university. It had extended to include much of the educated public. It is a phenomenon, indeed, that occurs, as we all have observed, in front of television sets or in the movie houses, or in the members of The Reader's Guild and the Book-of-the-Month Club as well as in the subscribers to *The New York Review of Books*.

In *Beyond Culture* Trilling's own response to this situation, both as a critic and teacher, was unlike the one he made earlier. During the Fifties it seemed to him that the literary mind might recover from its acculturation, and might by drawing on certain "healthy" imaginations as well as on other modes of inquiry, reconstitute itself. At this point, however, he had come to doubt what the modern aesthetic takes as self-evident: "that art yields more truth than any other intellectual activity." Notwithstanding the counter-culture's success in reducing literature's and criticism's effectiveness to reveal the world in its complexity, he asked whether the aesthetic mode of perception, even at its freest, could alone sustain us. His skepticism was directed to the epistemology which assumes that it is the creative imagination and art rather than reason and morality which provide us with the greater power over the world and ourselves. While questioning that assumption, he moved toward the assertion that in so far as aesthetic cognition is a cultural mode,

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bound by the immediate and concrete, it fails to allow the freedom of an objective view, one "beyond culture," beyond, as Arnold had said, "the spectacle of a vast multitude of facts inviting [man's] comprehension." Like Arnold, therefore, Trilling looked for sustenance in the mind, that faculty, as he said, "whose ancient potency our commitment to the idea of culture denies." Yet between Arnold and Trilling there remained a crucial difference: for the former, the mind was at last conceived of as the handmaiden to poetry, whereas for the latter, it became the primary means to knowledge with art assuming other important but lesser functions.

As an illustration of his new adversary position, Trilling concluded *Beyond Culture* by quoting a passage from one of Keats's letters which, as he commented, "should make the earth shake, although it does not; which should momently haunt our minds, although it does not." The statement reads: "Though a quarrel in the streets is a thing to be hated . . . , the energies displayed in it are fine; the commonest Man shows a grace in his quarrel—By a superior being our reasonings may take the same tone—though erroneous they may be fine—This is the very thing in which consists poetry; and if so it is not so fine a thing as philosophy—For the same reason that an eagle is not so fine a thing as truth." If Keats's dramatic "return upon himself," as Arnold would have called it, his sudden perception of the truth of the antithesis, does not disturb the literati's confidence, it may be, as Trilling indicated, because they view it as a temporary aberration. Or, as one might suggest, it may be that the statement appears so obviously eccentric that they feel it need not be considered. Or it may be that Keats's idea withitsreassertion of the superiority of mind over imagination does not in contemporary slang, "compute"—meaning, as I take it, that it does not add up to any conceivable sense. The words and the category of thought, that is to say, no longer signify.

Whatever the reason, in his Charles Eliot Norton lectures, 1969–1970, published as *Sincerity and Authenticity,* Trilling traced in effect the development of that literary consciousness which finds Keats's statement a kind of jabberwocky. And it was also then he recognized that behind the social phenomenon of the second environment lay a complex, cultural revolution, a radical revision of the moral life which first occurred at the end of the eighteenth century. This perception, that contemporary attitudes toward art, the mind, and the self had their roots in the origins of modern civilization, and were part indeed of its very fabric, led Trilling to the dark possi-

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bility that the "ancient potency" of the mind may have been vitiated. In *Sincerity and Authenticity,* in other words, he faced the prospect that the rational intellect which is capable of ameliorating the influence of culture and correcting its direction, the hope he looked to in *Beyond Culture,* was itself disappearing as a ready alternative to the dictates of civilization, including those prescriptions of the second environment. If that doubt was never overtly expressed in his lectures, it was part of the logic of his argument.

While no précis can suggest the ramifications and complexities of Trilling's extraordinary historical inquiry in *Sincerity and Authenticity,* in essence he argued that about two-hundred years ago a new sense of the self began to emerge as an antithesis to that which had developed during the Renaissance. This Renaissance notion was constituted by its valuation of the sincere man, and by its regard for the intelligence which realizes itself in society and appears to be what it actually is. Its whole effort was a noble one: to stand forthrightly and honestly as an individual before society, accepting the limitations and duties imposed on it. The sincere man's idea of art, in consequence, was pedagogic; its function was to teach the person to grow within the community, while it delighted and consoled him in his efforts. For Trilling the sincere man was epitomized by Diderot-*moi*, while his historical antithesis was represented by the nephew, Rameau, who sought his identity by refusing the conditions set forth by society, particularly that of honesty, the ethic which says that one should be what one seems. Rameau, to the contrary, negates that basis of community in an effort to become what he "authentically" is, selecting and creating chameleon-like any persona which suits his fancy. The ground of reality for him, then, is not society but exclusively the self which only reaches its freedom, according to Hegel, in painful alienation, through a procedure of disintegration in which earlier stages of being are continually negated. The art of the authentic consciousness served that same process, representing a vehicle for self-realization, conferring neither ethical truths nor consolation, but granting, on the contrary, as Trilling said, "the spiritual substance of life" in the experience of pain. As long as these two concepts were kept in balance, as they were in Diderot, Rousseau, and Wordsworth, they formed a complex idea, serving the interests of both the self and society. But as the synthesis gradually came apart in the nineteenth century under the influence of Hegel and Nietzsche, the

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truths of sincerity were lost to civilization, a development which was then completed in this century as manifested, for example, in Sartre. The final and radical result of the break-up revealed itself in our time in the psychology of R. D. Laing, David Cooper, Herbert Marcuse, and N. O. Brown, discussed by Trilling in his last and most cogent chapter, "The Authentic Unconscious."

Contemporary psychology's celebration of "madness" or psychosis as a means to and as evidence of both health and an unconditioned freedom, together with its wide acceptance by the educated public, brought Trilling near to the conclusion that the rational intellect could no longer act—for the present—in its traditional role of questioning and revising culture. At least it was helpless when it was confronted by such a doctrine of madness. As he said, "To deal with this phenomenon of our intellectual culture in the way of analytical argument would, I think, be supererogatory. The position may be characterized as being an intellectual mode to which analytical argument is not appropriate." By such a characterization, Trilling did not intend, however, as he continued, "to minimize [the position's] cultural significance . . . "; rather he assumed it to be "momentous." In short, contemporary culture was defined for him by its loss of belief, to one degree or another, in mind—with the psychology of madness occupying the extreme position. Not only had art been deprived of even its modest powers, but the critical intellect had also been enervated. Actually, in some instances, the mind could not even be assured that the terms upon which it proceeds and lives, those of reason, logic, and syntactical language, would be comprehensible in culture. Nothing, as Orwell realized in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, could be more momentous.

And yet oddly enough and much like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* itself, *Sincerity and Authenticity* does not leave one with an abiding sense of pessimism. For if, like Orwell, Trilling asked us to recognize the tragic possibilities of our civilization, he provided us in his last major work with a means of controlling the present, placing us "beyond culture," and thereby releasing us from its immediate hold. So if many of Arnold's "apostles of culture" had become, in Trilling's estimation, apostles of madness, he could still reassure us, if only by the power of his own example, that the mind can survive culture's present nihilism. The effect of *Sincerity and Authenticity*, then, is ironically liberating. For it provides us with an

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experience of mind in act, in the process of thought, which is in itself invigorating. For those who are convinced that the aesthetic experience, and what it entails of the sentience of being, is reserved for the fictive, *Sincerity and Authenticity* stands to confute them.

Nor is it merely the cogency of form which we find liberating in Trilling's lectures. Much as he did in his previous criticism, he continued to discover evidence of an adversary intelligence in the history of the modern age. Indeed in *Sincerity and Authenticity*, given the growing imperiousness of both society and culture, in the forms of the nation state and the second environment, Trilling's eye was cast at times more coldly on the imperatives of civilization than on those of the self. Consequently, he was not only prepared to celebrate authentic self-assertion in Diderot, Rousseau, Goethe, and Wordsworth, but also to admire it, if with severe irony, in Hegel, Nietzsche, Wilde, and Marinetti, Yet, of course, what he finally and fully valued were those minds who were able to balance the claims of civilization and self and of reason and imagination; those who took up the "patrician posture," as he described it, "of simultaneous acceptance and detachment from life in civilization." The availability of such intelligences, if only in the past, also consoles, for they "prop," to quote Arnold's line, "in these bad days" our minds.

The principal support Trilling looked to was Freud. And because of Freud's challenge of the irrational, his attempt to reclaim the province of the id for the ego, there is perhaps no better mind suited to our needs. Besides his commitment to the idea of sanity in his psychology, there is the example of his life which can also "prop," lived as it was with fortitude in the face of hostility to mind, and in defiance of the most fearsome political madness. For Trilling it was particularly the tragic dimension in Freud's total response to existence which constituted his permanent significance: that "tragic element," as he said, "and its inexplicable power to activate, by the representation of suffering, a faith quite unrelated to hope, a piety that takes virtually the form of pride—however harsh and seemingly gratuitous a fate may be, the authenticity of its implicit significance is not to be denied, confirmed as it is by the recognition of *some* imperative which has brought it into being and prescribed its acceptance, and in doing so affirmed the authenticity of him to whom the fate is assigned. It is this authenticating imperative, irrational and beyond the reach of reason, that Freud wishes to

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preserve." Himself dedicated to reclaiming reason, Trilling at this point returned upon himself to do homage to that which is not only beyond culture, but outside the province of the rational mind.

Still, if that biological imperative must be acknowledged to give weight and religious dignity to life, Trilling, like Freud, knew that unless one held on to its antithesis, reason, one could neither grasp the significance of the non-rational, nor could one achieve a measure of autonomy within nature and civilization, an independence which biology also urges. Again like Freud, Trilling based his thought on the faith that reason could ultimately prevail in civilization, that the "primacy of the intellect," as Freud said in *The Future of an Illusion*, is also a probability, a prospect itself based on human psychology. For Freud, the expectation was only to be fulfilled "in a distant, distant future, but probably not in an *infinitely* distant one." In "The Mind in the Modern World" and "The Uncertain Future of the Humanistic Educational Ideal," lectures given in 1972 and 1974 respectively, Trilling felt it certainly would not come within the present generation. Since the cultivation of mind requires that the self submit to conditions, to the exigencies of language, logic, and history, and since the modern idea of the self precluded, and indeed loathed, such disciplines, he realized that the rational intellect could no longer be looked to with confidence, any more than the imagination. For the time being at least, he believed, we stand in personal jeopardy, and, in so far as the state depends on mind for its direction, in political danger.

The austerity of Trilling's final view does not allow the comfort of pessimism, that perverse relief from the necessity of thought. If he did offer reassurance, it was his belief that despite the mind's disrepair it desires, as he said in the conclusion of "The Mind in the Modern World," "to be conscious of itself, with what this implies of its ability to examine a course it has taken and to correct it." And furthermore, in a kind of last turning, he suggested in "Why We Read Jane Austen," the lecture he was composing when he died, that literature still exists to teach and console us. If it does not, as had been so lately asserted, give us power over life or grant us a special spiritual prestige, it can make it possible, by putting us in contact with the past, to think of ourselves as other than we are, even to permit us to imagine ourselves *becoming* other than we are. Defined by culture as we conceive ourselves to be, we can yet derive a moral pleasure, an ease from the discontents of our minds, by

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perceiving those options, knowing that at another time at least, a novelist, like Jane Austen, could dramatize what we are not, even perhaps what we can never be. It is a simple kind of consolation, conferring an ordinary sort of autonomy, but nonetheless one providing a release from the omnipotence of the present. Yet, as Trilling so often said, it was in just such ordinary pleasures that we achieve so much dignity. Nothing could be more instructive about the nature of Lionel Trilling's thought than that he should happen to conclude by making these modest claims for the mind and for art.

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HILDA MORLEY

"So to suspend it"

So to suspend it
forever
as she does,
the little Flamenco dancer aged eleven
with the flounce of her skirt held loosely
in her steady hand, to root her body
in one place: push it outward
What there is of
passion—let it
be suspended & put off,
do not awaken it:
Let it be held away
So it extend itself
from close to
distant,
into all possible
arcs & parabolas of heat
Let it not
be accomplished
lest
forgetfulness
come next: the need for
forgetting
(obliterating
come too soon
So in that kernel of
her body
it be
held away, held up still,
held off
but then
made more so
from her body
on which the world can pivot
rocking as it spins
To learn from her,
the little Flamenco singer
aged eleven
who achieves it

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even without moving
out of her place,
so the little girl in the circle
of clapping women kneels, sinks down into
the earth it seems
& the women,
they clap her, clap her on,
standing
in a closed circle in their flounced dresses,
the girl with her one hand upflung
loosely
in a gesture of surrender,
in unison with
what streams through her
& her left hand holds the flounces
of her fiesta dress unclenched,
but firmly,
head back, mouth open,
listening
to the earth beneath her
pulsing
to her abandon
& all this
without moving from her place:
hub of a universe,
center
that she revolves on: tautness
of position chosen
for the power received there,
all of it

within twelve inches

(as do we talking,
we two, in a suspension,
sometimes,
staring,
listening
to a darkness turned to
burning
that consumes itself again to
darkness,
each time
more radiant

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PETER SERCHUK

Bent Tree

I go a long way back to find that bent tree.
Alone in the middle of the garden, it had a knot
at its center, a small space where as a child
I imagined animals once lived.

How the time has passed since I tagged that tree,
lobbed rope over the branches and swung below
all summer long. Afternoons I'd fall off into deep dreams
and open my eyes to see the world, the thick leaves
twitching above me in the wind like birds.

I remember years later looking for you in summer,
wondering where you might be on such a warm night.
Everything we loved had disappeared so fast.
And for nothing more than a fond thought I imagined you
beside that bent tree, you hair again long and
your skin wild, chanting my name at the fat moon.

Summer on Green Lake

All summer we fished for bluegills telling ourselves
we were fishing for bass. We guided our rowboat along the edge
of the weedbank, our poles like small branches alive in the wind.

Mornings were warm and humid. In the clear spaces between
rocks and weeds we tracked the small-mouths, their wide fins
twisting coyly
away, their fertile bellies reflecting in the small ripples of sun.

How we craved those sleek ones we never caught!
Others we knew we couldn't eat we threw back.
Sailboats sailed by, their white sheets wide as the mouths of
flowers.

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In the hot afternoon we moved under trees bent over
the shore. Near the house we could see our wives playing cards on the lawn.
We remembered how the lake froze numb in winter.

At night we stopped rowing and gave ourselves over to drifting.
In the dark we heard the fish bob the surface for air
as the moon spread its fingers into the corners of the lake.

Oh the chances we gave ourselves on Green Lake, believing each day
we'd either catch the fish or forget them, believing
those dark beauties could be angled from their nests.

And each morning we'd lower the boat, our fingers moist
in the sun. And each evening we'd raise it up again, cracked oars
and small leaks, our buckets still empty.

Last Words at Marblehead

We stood on a small mound near the lighthouse, alone
in grey fog, listening to salt water slap the shore rocks beneath us.
I knew we would never be that lonely again.

Closer to the sand we listened to each other speak and listened
to the foam slide back through the pebble-bed. The sucking
made a dead sound, hollow as the wind which chased the gulls away.

We wanted a pain much deeper than our own.
We wanted an ache more fearful than forgetting. We wanted the water
to wrap us in its tongue, to teach us how to sleep.

Chilled and frightened, you motioned me back to the car but I stood
waiting, for a sign or a ghost, for a voice, for no one but my unwilling self
to stare out and turn away, to choose nothing over nothing.

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DAVID RAY

Hymn to Aunt Edris

> That I did love thee . . . O, 'tis true! . . .
> Why, I will see thee in Philippi then . . .
> Now I have taken heart thou vanishest.
> Ill spirit, I would hold more talk with thee . . .
> Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

Old katydids in the West Tulsa night!
Refineries burning off their oil in fiery pools.
Uncle Henry holding a picket sign in wind that whipped him.
At night, on his shoulder, holding hair, I stooped
through the doorway of the soup kitchen
where we bent over a long table, eating soup,
a family of hundreds, and went back for more.
Tell me again where my father's supposed to be.
Aunt Edris, your great swinging breasts
were pendulum of time too I see now, but then
this small boy wished to press his cheeks
against you, and couldn't tell you,
and you were young, though I didn't know it
then, laughing that Henry's toes were cold.
Your bed sounded warm, through that curtain
that hung between us. On the floor
we children threw cockroaches from us,
the only ones who loved our bodies,
and heard your giggles, tickles, guessed
at your rolling movements, tried to ape them
on our own flat bodies. But you turned
into a dolphin in the night, swam
as we could not, bore Henry
through the tossing waves, then wept.
More whys and wherefores to puzzle us!
The smell of your biscuits woke us
and you put us on the ice-cold table while
we watched you move in flannel about those warped
linoleum floors. The oven had a handle

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made of coiled and gleaming wires.
Only for you would I run those errands
through ditches to bring back butter
that was not butter, had no color;
and later Henry left the picket lines
and his face became something that we always
feared. He threatened to throw us off
the bridge. Fourth of July he threw
firecrackers at us, had the dog chase us
round and round the house, under clotheslines.
Unwanted. So be it. But you I still want.
And dear woman find in the face of my own beloved
whose face is round as a biscuit, like yours,
and smiling, for she won't mistreat me.
Take me again, Edris, out to the outhouse,
in the rain, stepping from plank to plank,
it's our house, of cracked and rotting wood.
The lightning shows your face up close.
You hold me in your arms, and step lightly,
shaking, avoiding spiders, and the years.

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MARK PERLBERG

The Leap

My family moved to Kansas when I was a girl.
Father was an engineer and worked on a project there.
We lived in a house beyond the edge of town;
It stood by itself at the foot of a long, sloping hill.
Mother was strict. Every afternoon, even in summer,
She'd come to where I would be playing alone
And say, "Lou-Ann, go upstairs now and take your nap. It's time."
So, after a time I'd drag off with my doll to my room
Near the attic; it looked out over the wide empty fields.
Well, summers in Kansas are just not to be borne.
The heat goes over a hundred in the fields
And in any room in a house where the sun falls.
I was just a child; I couldn't stay on my bed,
  it got so warm.
I would lie on the floor with a cool patch of boards
Against my back, and smell the dust in my room,
And listen for the heat crackling in the empty fields.
Then, after a while, I'd get up and look out my window—
  way up the hill. And every afternoon at three
She'd come. Oh, it wasn't my mother.
A lady would ride up the hill on a great white horse.
She was dressed in white, always.
She'd rein in her horse at the brow of the hill
And stand there, looking.
Then she'd leap—horse and all—into the river.
I learned to wait for her ride in that sullen heat,
Every day at three in the afternoon,
And for her long silent fall to the water.

I kept that story to myself for thirty years.
Then one day I told mother.
"Lou-Ann," she said, "I'm amazed.
You know there wasn't a river near our house.
The nearest was twenty miles away."
"Is that so," I said. "Isn't it strange, then,

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that I learned to wait for the woman and her white horse,
that I counted on their coming,
and their leap together—their long floating fall to the river—
all those summer afternoons,
in the heat, in my room,
in the house in Kansas."

JOSEPH BRUCHAC

Drinking from the Maple Buckets

1

Night cups its hand
over the hill.
My feet slip on stones
buried in March snow
as I pick my way
through saplings which grasp
at my shirt with their tiny fingers.

Looking back upslope,
lights from the house blind me,
until I remember
one must shade one's eyes
against human lights
to see a path in darkness.

2

Through the branches to my left,
smooth and cold as onyx,
a firefly glitters:
the Evening Star.

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3

Lifting the first bucket,
I sip water which flows
against Earth's weight.
A clean light taste
clings to my lips.

Then, glimpsing a pattern
in the bottom of the bucket,
I raise my head
as I did when I drank
and see above me
The Big Dipper pouring
the cold liquid
of this night upon my face.

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JACK MARSHALL

Hurrying Ends

He knew he was an impatient man: people told him so often enough, and he knew they used to make bad jokes about it, but the way Ralph experienced it in himself was not as the perpetrator of rudeness, but as a victim; he was made to wait. He waited in line at stores, banks and post offices; he waited, changing his packages from hand to hand, clicking with his tongue, his heels rising and falling like muted hammers that strike the hour; it is Time, it is Time. His fingers would drum, his jaws would work in a grinding rhythm; he would feel the beat of blood in his head and a swelling rage at it all while the uncaring clerks at the windows counted change. He waited for his wife to go or to come or to dress or to undress, and at last he waited in the hospital corridor, drumming his fingers and tapping his foot while her pulse lost its beat and her heart stilled, and in the moment he had tried to hold her softness back from the place her faraway look seemed to keep in readiness as revenge for breathing, he suddenly found himself in a silence so vast and prolonged it isolated the moment out of time and place, and then he was alone again as he had been before he met her. At first, he couldn't imagine living without her; then, as those same moments he believed contained the only happiness in his life became painful reminders of what he would never feel again, he knew he couldn't live with her memory, either. The trouble with life was not that it didn't give you what you wanted, but that it did and then took it away.

Now he was waiting in the doctor's office, promised again and again deceived. They had told him his appointment was at three. It's a contract, he told himself; I was here at three! And he sighed, his fingers beginning to drum on the table in front of him. The woman across from him looked up from her magazine and glared; he transferred the drumming to his knee. The waiting room had been discouragingly full when he arrived, and it still was. He glanced briefly at each of the other patients, measuring them as they sat with blank, averted faces, their suffering hidden decently behind their clothes. Twenty minutes. He picked through the pile

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of magazines on the table, selected one, and began turning the pages more to keep rhythm than out of any interest. When he waited he found he could never commit himself to anything else; the fact of his having to wait would not let him go.

Thirty-five minutes. A contract, and they had broken it and he was being kept against his will, committed by the time he had already spent waiting, like a bad business deal it was too late to cancel. He put down the magazine and began to riffle quickly through the pages of another. On the other side of the waiting room, people stared impassively, more practiced at disguising their impatience the more pain they endured. His brother Bert had always kidded him about his impatience: "You're like a time bomb ticking off minutes for an explosion." When Ralph had tried to explain once, Bert said: "Sure, go ahead, but let me tell you something; you and your ideas are going to end up just as much shit as I am." Maybe so, but Ralph had been successful, and he was still alive.

Which Bert was not, for all his ease and good-humored kidding. You have to own your days, every one of them, not just weekends, or else the years go by in a flash. He had wanted to tell that to Bert but had never quite been able to get it out, and now it was too late.

Then his eye wavered and broke out of focus on the magazine page, and the picture of the watch there suddenly went double and he again felt himself shaken without warning. This past year had been hell to live through alone. He and his brother had been in business together for fifty-two years. They had started with two rolls of reeking brocade, a giveaway from Nesson's after the fire. Two hustling sixteen and seventeen-year-old high school dropouts and two rolls of water-hosed brocade. The late, weary hours they stayed open in shifts; the hassle with creditors and cops; the periodic burglaries through the doors and roof, regular as clockwork, forcing them to wire the store till they were tripping over themselves; the stray women who, in exchange for sets of cheap jewelry, lay down on the rug pile in the back room; brash, youthful pleasure that slipped through his hands like the turning of a quick profit he would soon spend and forget in prodigious boasting bouts with salesmen hired almost as much to listen as to sell. Then, with hardly a courtship, he had married and later wondered sometimes if the reason might have been to put a stop to the anxiety that it was he who was at the beck and call of whatever piece of ass, momentarily desireable or not, that breezed in from the infected street. He

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had come to feel in himself that late-blooming indignation of the newly innocent. For a long time now, the problem along with the desire did not trouble him—the fact that he was beyond caring about the absence of desire once so strong in him; he was out of its reach now; time had seen to that.

In the background, now, he saw the blurred image of his father, long gone, yet a younger man than he himself was right now, and he remembered how his father used to repeat his favorite slogan: "Time is money and money is time; make money in quick time but don't do time making money." He wished the old man had lived to see him put both time and money to good use; how he and Bert had overcome many false starts, mistakes, and complications between that brocade and getting that first store and then enlarging it and getting the second and the third. What he couldn't remember now was when Bert's face had begun to sag with age, when his eyelids had thickened and the jowls hung. He had never stopped thinking of himself and Bert as kids together, even after both of them were married, Bert a grandfather and himself a widower. Sometimes they even said it: "Hey, kid, what can we do with this shipment of muslin?" He never meant it ironically. If a stock-boy snickered, he thought it was because of the difference in address—that Bert wasn't really "Mr. Slovin" but "kid."

Then, the year before last, one day in the middle of the summer, when the woolens were just begining to come in for the fall push and there was planning to be done and a new sales campaign to be worked out, an old man came up to him with a face crumpled like tissue paper and sunken eyes, in whom evidence of bearing the weight of his body around was etched in the puffy, wincing face. And it was Bert. He was so shocked, he stood and stared and then looked away to try to hide the shock, and he could barely hear what Bert was saying to him.

They went to lunch, the old man still calling him "kid," although Ralph could no longer say it. Bert began to tell him what had happened. "You know, I haven't been feeling too good lately. I went to the doctor yesterday, and he told me I couldn't stay with the business full time if I wanted to see seventy. I told him I couldn't leave the business—what should I do? I asked him if I couldn't stay at least until after Christmas. He said it was out of the question. I said, October, then, at least for the fall sale. He said I'd have to keep it to half time or he wouldn't be responsible." The face looked so stunned and puzzled that Ralph had to extricate himself

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from the saddened features he could feel becoming his own, and had to struggle to get his mouth smiling and his shoulders to shrug. He cleared his choked, fat-obstructed throat and said, "You had me worried for a minute. With three stores and a wife wanting a real vacation for the first time in forty years, why not play hooky for the winter?" He leaned forward, trying to sound easy and jovial. "Where does she want to go? The Islands? Hawaii?"

"I hadn't really thought of going anywhere. I wanted to talk to you first, Ralph. I don't *want* to retire."

Ralph reassured him, overplaying his casualness a little; there was no question of retiring, only taking a break, resting up, getting a little strength back.

Bert didn't make it through October, even on three hours a day. His hands lost coordination, so that his writing was barely legible, and he began to make silly mistakes with numbers, saying 210 when he meant 1200, and countersigning the errors when his secretary caught them back with cruelly polite question marks penciled in lightly beside them. His vacation plans were never mentioned again. In September, he stopped working but showed up anyhow, slack-jawed, hands trembling, haunting the stores until the stores were haunted by his illness so that customers backed out the door and the hired help shook their heads and looked away. By December, he was at home, alternately shrill and passive before the television set. By spring, even television's unchanging plots were beyond him. The last year, in the hospital, his death, finally, was a kind of triumph. Without mind or memory, he had fought the pumping, clicking machines with their tubes and needles force-feeding him blood and nourishment, and had been able to pay for that year's agony all by himself, without going begging.

Someone in the waiting room coughed, a hard, hollow cough that brought Ralph back from the last image he had of Bert. He found himself still staring at the advertisement of the wristwatch, and he looked around uneasily, hoping that no one had noticed him peering all that time like an idiot at a picture of a watch. No one moved, no one cared, and his eye fell back to the magazine.

It was a nice presentation, that picture; it was well done. When he and Bert started to expand, they found that the big ads they were putting in the papers weren't enough, and they got a man in to design something more ambitious. It was hard to tell if the new advertising did any good, really, or if it was the Muzak or the fire-

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red SALE signs or the marked-down leader items in the windows; but it was part of the way things were done now, and some of what the advertising men had said stuck with him.

He studied the page again. Very effective. It was an engraving of a wristwatch that appeared to hold the solar system inside the circle of its band. There was just the word "Helichron" at the top and then the picture and nothing else, except way down at the bottom of the page, where it wouldn't distract the eye: "A watch running on a tiny, powerful, replaceable battery has certain distinct advantages. Ask your jeweler."

He half rose and leaned forward so he could see the clock behind the receptionist's desk. Fifty minutes. A fifty-minute wait. What did they take him for? He ran a large business; he had had dealings with buyers and merchandisers and union men, bankers and brokers, and none of them had kept him waiting for fifty minutes. He was about to get up and leave in disgust when the receptionist called his name and a nurse came out and ushered him into one of the offices. She told him in a rote manner to take his clothes off and put on the examination gown. Before he could say anything, she was gone.

There was nothing to do but go ahead and strip. The examination gown was a little white paper thing, and wearing it seemed somehow to diminish him; he stood humbled in it, his thin legs sticking out bare and pale, and he felt sicker in some intangible way than by the sickness that had brought him here. They know, he thought, those doctors. The waiting softens you up, and this puts the clincher on it. If you don't advertise, you have to have ways to keep the customers coming back. A bit of good old fear is all it takes. And he chuckled to himself and tried to feel better.

The doctor came in and apologized briskly for the long wait. He asked some questions in an impersonal, not unfriendly professional manner, pausing to tick off a chart that Ralph could not see. The physical examination was simple, and much of it was like those he had had when he was a child, feeling chilled and vulnerable, with the usual thumpings and probes and requests that he cough.

When he had finished dressing again, he was shown into another office, with books and diplomas, and now the doctor's careful professionalism was becoming a little distracting. Ralph wondered if he might really be very ill and the doctor was hedging, hiding the bad news.

"You've got a few minor things that bear watching," the doctor

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said. "Nothing unusual for a man of your age, but I'd like you to come in for some more tests in the morning, before you've eaten—and we'll need a urine specimen. If you'll see the nurse outside I've checked off the tests we'll need, and she has the instructions all ready. So you'll know just what to do. In case there's another attack of the dizziness and pain you complained of, I've ordered some of these for you." He handed Ralph a sheet of paper with an illegible prescription across the desk.

Ralph took it, rising heavily and carefully in his newly fragile body. He thanked the doctor, who had turned to something else and looked back at him with a little annoyance. Before he left, Ralph made his appointment at the nurse's desk and took the printed sheet of instructions humbly. Then, with a lift of self-righteous pride, he walked, successfully intact, past the chairs of the other petitioners, who still waited.

He came to himself in the street, clutching the instruction sheet and the prescription in his hand. He read the sheet: "Do not take liquids for a twelve-hour period before—." He looked away from the instructions to the street, and he saw Bert, hung with tubes, a ghost, moaning in that bare, white room. And now he was letting them begin it with him. Here he was on a fine afternoon, a man who could work a full day, a man with business to transact, with a life that was his own, a man still standing up in his clothes, thank God, and now he was going to let them put paper dresses on him and reduce him to the numbing ordeal of machines. "No!" he said quite loudly, and stepping over to a litter basket, shredded the prescription and the instructions into it and walked away.

Two weeks later, he was going from his office in the main store to have lunch with an importer when the dizziness came over him again, and the ache riding spurs into his back. He stopped, waiting for the pain to slow and his eyes to clear. He was sweating; his palms, forehead, and groin were suddenly wet with it. He was terrified. As the first blackness passed, warmth came flooding back and a too-rapid, sickish easing that replaced the chill of the sweat. He tried to walk again as if nothing had happened, fighting to remember where he was going and whom he was to meet. He lost his breath again and had to stop by a building until he could get it back. The second wave of nausea and dizziness faded slowly; the grayness ebbed, his mind cleared. He was all right now—it was just a little spell.

When he came to the hotel, he felt a brief return of the pain, but

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since there was no dizziness with it, he went on into the restaurant and was shown to the table where the importer was already waiting.

The man greeted him, and then his face began to show concern. "Are you all right? You look a little pale."

Hearing himself reassure the importer, Ralph felt reassured himself, ordering a big lunch and sitting back to talk with careful attention. As they ate, he motioned toward the man's wrist. "That watch you're wearing—is that a special watch? I seem to remember seeing one like it somewhere."

"Yes, it's a Helichron." The importer laughed, indulging himself. "It operates on solar batteries." He moved his shirt-sleeve up and took off the watch to show it to Ralph. "See—." He turned it over and snapped it open. The usual, delicately balanced miniature universe of wheels and gears was absent. Inside the thin metal shell there were only three small gears, two little wire leads, the posts from which they hung, and a small milled nickel capsule resting to one side. "They've got these batteries, so they store a year's supply of power. When the year is up, you take them to the watchmaker, he pops in another battery, attaches those leads, and there you are. The batteries hardly cost anything, and there's no winding and no setting. It keeps perfect time."

"Don't you ever set it?" Ralph asked. The importer smiled tolerantly, and Ralph noticed there was no winder button on the watch. "What if it slows down?"

"This works just like an electric clock. You never need to adjust that unless your power quits, and this battery lasts for a year."

"But when it starts to lose power—?"

"That's the part I like best. When the battery begins to go, the watch stops automatically. It's one of the qualities of this battery, but they've put some kind of governor in there, too, just to make sure—because you get to depend on a watch like this."

"And are the batteries easy to get?"

"Unless you're going to Peru. They have one of their main stores about three blocks from here, as a matter of fact, up on Van Allen, but any watchmaker can replace the batteries. If you have a steady hand, they'll sell you a little tool and you can replace them yourself." He closed the back of the watch with a delicate scratch-snap that made a pleasing sound. "Gadgets, I love 'em. Most of them don't work, but this watch is really something."

"Well," Ralph said slowly, "I guess I don't really need a watch.

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Everywhere you go there's a clock, nowadays." For some reason he couldn't explain, he didn't want the man to know how taken he was by the watch, as if that revelation were too deep and personal and would compromise him in some way.

When he left the restaurant after lunch, he had a solid feeling of satisfaction. His pain was gone; he had come close to working out the arrangements on a deal for $85,000 worth of Italian and Japanese silk. He didn't want to go back to his office right away. He wanted to walk a little, to make sure that the pain and dizziness were really gone, to prove that his body was his own again. He walked to the store on Van Allen Street, listened carefully while a clerk demonstrated and explained, and then bought the watch.

He soon found himself as eager as the importer had been to snap off the back of his watch and reveal its simplicity and effortlessness. In the begining, he could hardly believe that the watch would keep time without any winding and setting. He didn't have to begin any of its rhythms nor endure that brief moment's death until the gears engaged and cause rolled over into effect. The watch simply went.

The manager of the branch store began to kid him about it, and when the cashiers and bookkeeper saw that he liked the kidding, they joined in. "What time is it, Mr. S.?"

"Look at the clock," he would say gruffly and point to the Benrus on the wall. "The union says we have to have a clock for the clock watchers."

"But that clock doesn't give the latest time. The clock in the Lincoln Street store is five minutes faster."

"Well, Lincoln Street is east of here—" he would clear his throat—"different time zone." And then he would push up his sleeve majestically and give them the time. It was always at variance with the wall clock, and it was always correct when the bookkeeper checked it by phone time. The other stores soon picked up the joke, and it gradually settled into the vacuum that had been left by the end of joking about Bert and his bargains and his golf swing. The wound was being healed.

Ralph's loneliness, too, was slowly easing. They had a very good back-to-school season this year. Before he could think, they were into the late fall season. Then there were Christmas, cruise season, a big pre-spring sale and closeout, graduation and bridal, vacation season and on again through the summer closeout and back to school. These commercial seasons superseded the other more natural divisions of the year, but they, too, came in their rhythm and

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followed one another in faithful order into time past. To Ralph, they were not a boring round of buying and selling; they had come to be more meaningful to him than the seasons of present weather, and it comforted him to know that there were still people going back to school, people getting married and having children.

There were days when he couldn't believe that he had ever suffered. Weeks went by when he would lift bolt after bolt of cloth impatiently out of the stock boy's hands and run up the ladders to show them how to slide the heavy rolls into place on the shelves without bunching or wrinkling the fabric. He tore miles of goods into mountains of remnants, relishing both the feel of the cloth and the sound of its tearing, and sensing the moments as exquisite and priceless and that in some future time when he would look back on them they would be even more so.

Then there were other weeks when his body seemed unable to recoup its lost strength, and it took all his effort and will to make it rise in the morning, dress and do what he asked of it. At these times, he forced it to work, hour by hour, through the day. If those were the terms, so be it.

But the terms were the terms of the enemy, and they were deceptive. The dizziness might wait a week, a month, two months. The pain might streak back and forth across his nerves to and from its hiding places and then sink to sleep. It slumbered, hidden, and grew fat in his good fortune. Then, at no signal he could name, for no reason he could trace, dizziness and pain would break upon him suddenly with a relentless pounding at his back and a blackness before his eyes. In those sieges, he would promise himself desperately that he was going to see the doctor again and submit to all the humiliation of tests and waits, but in an hour the black-white faintness would fade to gray, and the nausea would ease, and in a day or two the pain would tire itself out, and in a week, shrunken like a sullen dwarf, it would limp away again to sleep. Then his terror would dissolve into anxiety, the anxiety into a cautious relief, the relief into a humble acceptance at the ease and beauty there were in a day's work and a night's sleep.

But he knew the time was slowly narrowing between these attacks and that he was tiring himself trying to outrace them. And in his tiredness and fear, he knew he was begining to make mistakes. He had among other things, been foolish in overlooking the impact of the pop-art fabric that had taken hold all over the country. He had waved it off as a fad for the teenagers, those nightmarish

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patterns and Day-Glo colors. How many designs could anyone stand as loud as that? Once the market was sated, the fad would stop; it would be finished, out, in a way he had seen a hundred times before, an invisible thumb turned down between Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, and thousands of dollars of stock left untouched on the shelves and more glutting the warehouses.

A smart goods-man hedges on fads or he loses his shirt. Who would have believed that grown women, middle-aged, grandmothers even, would suddenly begin to cut short shifts out of that heartburn cloth? By the time he saw the mistake, it was already too late. He tried to pass it off to himself, but he knew he hated the vibrating loudness of those new fabrics because they reminded him of his illness and his fear.

In the grip of his fear, he found himself conciously trying to change some of his ways, to be more patient. Impatience ran so deep in him that the work of changing was highly visible. His managers noticed it and were confused and uncomfortable. Antabi, at the Lincoln Street store, began to shift his feet and make excuses whenever Ralph conquered the nervous urgency and forced himself to relax and talk about the weather or politics or even sex. Antabi had always been the one to stop him from leaving right away—"Oh, Mr. S.—" and telling a joke to keep him. Ralph had been pleased to be kept from leaving because Antabi did it out of a liking for him. Now they all thought up reasons to get away. It saddened him to think of it—five minutes and they were tearing their hair.

One day he had overheard Glover, in the Halstead Boulevard store, talking about him, and he was embarrassed.

"He can't even let anybody else close the stores," Glover had said.

"Oh, he's always been that way, but now it seems so much more important to him."

Tuesday and Thursday nights the main store stayed open until ten. The two branch stores were open on Thursday only, and they closed at nine. After his wife had died, he got in the habit of closing one of the branch stores and then going back to Lincoln Street, where his office was, and checking on last minute things. It took about an hour to finish after closing time. Once the main lights were turned out, the aisles had to be swept and the dust covers put over the counters. The day's receipts were added, the money was put in the safe, and the registers were made up for the next day's opening.

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Even before Bert died, Ralph had been the one to snap the door shut at the main store, to be the very last one out. Now, even though Antabi had been with him for eleven years, he felt an increasing need to do that last thing of the day. If he was seeing one of his few friends or had stopped, during one of the difficult times, to take in a movie, he would leave early in order to get back and close up.

Tonight he had left the Cherrydale store and decided to stop for a bite to eat in another part of the shopping center. He thought of going back after his dinner and waiting until the store was ready to close, but then decided against it. It wasn't a good idea to visit and then come back the same day. The employees felt you didn't trust them; it was bad for morale. So he had about three and a half hours to kill between now and the time they would be locking up for the night at the other branch. Then, of course, he would go to Lincoln Street.

The weather was nice, and he didn't want to waste time in the movies. For a moment he turned outside the restaurant and paused uncertainly, and then the idea came to him exactly what he wanted to do. Most of the other stores were open tonight, too. It had been years since he had nosed around and seen what the competition was up to. He had a sudden feeling of delight; he felt like a movie spy, a secret agent passing himself off as an ordinary shopper.

It was funny, because Bert was always the one who went to "take a look." In the dumbest hick towns, he would be drawn to any place where a person could buy a yard of dress goods. Once his car broke down in a spot called Pigeon River, and he came back with one of his stories: "This storekeeper had three bolts of goods—a brown wool and a bolt of gray chambray with a little blue stripe. That's the winter and the summer. That takes care of fashions. Then he had one bolt of striped canvas—like mattress ticking. That was the decorator bolt. Now, what was funny was that this was okay with everybody in Pigeon River. I didn't see anyone who wasn't wearing something in that gray chambray with the little stripe, and if I'd been there in the winter I swear it would've been brown wool, like uniforms. And then, from the decorator bolt—." How they had laughed, then.

Now he walked through the shopping center to the big department store and went up on the escalator to the yard-goods section. Then, as he stood before the beckoning plenty of it all, he remem-

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bered why it had been Bert and not he who had gone around to case the competition. How strange to have forgotten something so painful and so much a part of him. It was the jealousy. How could he have forgotten how bitterly, wretchedly jealous he would become if the goods in the other store were fine and the place was carpeted? He hadn't been able to stand it, finally, and had left the visiting to Bert. Now that, too, had changed; he was free of it at last. He smiled; at least you could outgrow some things; there was some mercy waiting, after all.

He was walking easily and happily up and down the spacious, well-lit aisles. He noticed how well they displayed their quality merchandise, but their out-of-season fabrics were set too far back for the customers to see. They were underselling them in most of their woolens, and they had some textured synthetics he had never seen, but his silk and Dacron were still far ahead and the cottons nicely competitive. Secret agent. He put his hand to his mouth to hide the smile.

Checking his watch, he saw that there was still plenty of time. He could take in the stores near the Halstead branch. He strolled away from the long swaths of vibrant blues and greens and the drip-dry and knife-pleated fanned out around them in great flowers.

Outside, the evening was slowly deepening. At the corner, he took a bus toward the south side of town and sat at the window and looked at the first lights and the neon, the early glare of the city's evening. He was thinking about how different the three stores were: Cherrydale was the newest, young and discrete in the new shopping center; the Halstead branch was an older sister, hardworking and unpraised, plain goods and no nonsense. And then there was Lincoln Street, his big, bustling, noisy madhouse, his favorite, his firstborn, full of life and arguments and mice and problems. He would close at Halstead and then go home.

He got off the bus at Sixteenth and Halstead, six blocks from the store. There were two places: Loefler's and Hagan's. He would just look in and see what was going on. When he passed Loefler's he decided not to go in. It was amazing how that store had gone down since he had passed it last winter. Old man Loefler had died. Ralph had heard something about a cousin running it now, but whoever it was really didn't know or care about the store. He looked in the window as he went past. What a dreary, unappealing place it had turned into. The clerks looked bitter-mouthed, and everything was sleazy and stale. In earlier days, passing such a defeated place would have lighted a small glow of triumph in him, just a glimmer,

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before he put it out of his mind and was ashamed. Now there was only a weary sorrow. Old man Loefler had been a hard worker—now look.

He walked on to Hagan's and was surprised to find it dark. Strange. Perhaps they had changed their nights. He looked at his watch. Nine-thirty. It was better to wait a while until his own store was just ready to lock up. If he went in now, they would have to stop what they were doing, and it would mean delay and a little resentment at having to get home late. Most of the men had families. Ralph was proud of the way he treated his people.

He stopped at a narrow coffee place squeezed in between two freight exits and had a sweet roll and tea. His timing was right for a nice goodnight to everyone and that solid door latch in his hand. He sauntered up the block to pass his big store window. It was dark. He went to the door. Closed. He tried it a few times. Locked. But it couldn't be. Had something happened to make them leave early? He put his face to the glass to see if anyone was inside, but the store was empty, dark.

He looked at his watch again. It was 9:55 and he realized that he might have cut the time a little thin. He always allowed a full hour for finishing up; maybe they had just got through very quickly. He had never come to a store of his at night and found it dark. It gave him an eerie feeling, like being in a graveyard. He shook his head and went to the corner to catch a bus for downtown.

He was already on the bus and moving before he realized that he had taken it by habit, that he should have taken a cab. He wanted to hurry back to Lincoln Street, to be safe and in rhythm with the day again. It was humiliating and a little frightening, and he felt his impatience rising to his fingers to tap out the time on the window ledge while the bus crept from stop to stop in the same automatic, frustrating way. By the time it reached Eighteenth and Lincoln, he was trembling with impatience, and when it finally pulled up at the Seventeenth Street stop, he all but hurled himself out into the street. The doors closed with an obscene sound behind him, and the bus pulled away while he stood on the curb and looked along the length of the store with its big window. It was dark; the whole block was dark. All up and down the block, dark windows.

He felt a sinking sensation and thought stupidly: Where will I go? What will I do? The panic was almost free, pulling past his control in a rhythmic pulse, heavy and drawn-out, at the sides of his throat. He couldn't move and he had to sob to catch his breath.

Only after long minutes, standing and swaying in the middle of

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that cemetery of night-buildings, did it occur to him that it might have been his watch, that it might have been wrong. He put it to his ear and heard the usual slight hum. His watch didn't tick; its parts didn't have to endure that blow of contact between springs, gears, and wheels. His watch had the constant, unstopping hum of power of a secret piece of the sun.

He lay awake all night in the apartment where he stayed but did not live. He could not trust enough to surrender his consciousness to sleep. Early next morning, he dressed and sat stiffly at his small breakfast table, centered bitterly between a blaring radio and a blaring television set. The 7:00 news, according to his watch, was being broadcast at 5:48, the 8:00 report at 6:52, and the 9:00 at 7:35.

Scowling into the late morning he went, his head low and held forward, his face set toward the salesroom of the Helichron Company. His pace was not the cutomary one for such a store; it stirred a wind behind it and a small, wavering wake of salesmen sensing trouble. He went, without needing to be told, to the second floor and from there to the manager's office. He burst in and confronted the large man working over a series of blueprints and charts with a secretary and several others. Rage was begining to seethe over the rim of his discipline. Promises were made! And then he threw the watch on the desk before them all, where it buried itself among the papers.

"Promises were made!"

"Uh—Mr."

"Look at the time. Look at what time it is!"

He saw the manager weighing approaches, as he himself had done a hundred times: to be reasonable or threatening, outraged or conciliatory, and wondering which one would work. To gain a minute, the manager pushed among the papers and picked up the watch. His face showed that it was visibly and incontrovertibly off time. Ralph waited, tapping his foot. The manager put the watch to his ear and seemed to sense the slight, almost inaudible whisper in the smooth hum, a beat that shouldn't have been there. He listened intently, his brow furrowing. There it was again, like the sound of a leak in a valve. He took the watch from his ear.

"The cell," he said quietly, in order to be reasonable, "the cell is losing its charge." Then he allowed his voice to brighten, because the problem could be dealt with, now. "Very rarely, but sometimes, the metal governor that we've affixed to the cell undergoes a slight oxidation, and so the watch does run down instead of stopping as it

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should. We'll replace the watch, of course, and give you the new cell free of charge, and we're very sorry for the inconvenience." He found himself staring into Ralph's face, a face contorted with terrible grief.

"You don't understand," Ralph whispered hoarsely, "promises were made—you promised—"

"But these mistakes happen, and it's nothing that we can't—"

"—that it would stop, stop when it was still strong, that it would stop before it was too late." And leaving the watch in the manager's hand, the hand still slightly extended toward him, Ralph turned and walked from the room, and as he did, the first wave of dizziness began to darken the day before his face, and the first stroke of pain broke into the open passageways of his flesh, begining to beat toward the visceral places, where his life was waiting, alone and unprotected.

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La Négresse 1952–53 Collage (Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund)
HENRI MATISSE

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CHARLES W. MILLARD

The Matisse Cut-Outs[1]

MATISSE SEEMS TO HAVE BEGUN USING cut and pasted paper in the middle 1930's as a convenient method of studying the compositions of decorative projects such as bookcovers, stage curtains and scenery, tapestries, and stained glass windows. When, in 1941, a serious intestinal operation made the physical effort of painting and sculpting difficult, forcing him to remain in bed for extended periods, he began to make the paper cut-out his principal expressive medium. Starting with *Jazz* in 1943–44, and continuing through the Vence chapel studies of 1948–52 to his death in 1954, it became the technique in which Matisse achieved the culminating synthesis of his art. Although small in size and, often, in scale, the earliest cut-outs suggest most of the characteristics of the more developed later work. A comparison of *Deux Danseurs, "Rouge et Noir"* (1937/38) with *Petit Danseur sur fond rouge* (1937/38) indicates the superiority of freer, more open compositions to those more restricted in nature, while the *Danseur* dedicated to Léonide Massine (1937/38) exhibits Matisse's tendency to float organic and/or amorphous configurations over geometrically defined grounds, and the *Nature morte au coquillage* (1941) exemplifies the strength he could achieve by permitting colored shapes to relate to one another across an uninflected white background. In the beginning, the cut-out technique was used additively by Matisse. In *Deux Danseurs, "Rouge et Noir"* for example, one can see him building the composition up out of small, irregular applications of paper, much as he might have constructed a painted composition out of successive brushloads of pigment. Soon, however, he started to compose not by adding but by subtracting, cutting away a large sheet of colored paper until he had arrived at the amount of color, and at the shape, he needed. This is particularly true of the large, late works, in which Matisse began with a sea of color, reducing it to the point at which it made the expressive point he demanded of it and it demanded of itself. In this his method was wholly sculptural, and one is reminded of Michaelangelo's observation that the art of sculpture is the art of knowing when to stop, of knowing when a sufficiently expressive form has been revealed as one cuts away the block of marble. The edge-defining movement of Matisse's scissors was simultaneously a means of drawing so that, considered methodologically, the cut-outs are an amalgam of drawing, painting, and sculpture, a profound and wholly modern synthesis of the arts.

The project that apparently legitimized cut paper as a medium for Matisse was *Jazz*. Commissioned by Tériade in 1942, and issued in 1947,

[1] These thoughts were stimulated by "Henri Matisse Paper Cut-Outs," an exhibition held at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, 10 September–23 October 1977; The Detroit Institute of Arts, 23 November 1977–8 January 1978; The Saint Louis City Art Museum, 29 January–12 March 1978.

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Jazz was of such scope—146 pages, including 20 stencilled plates—as to permit Matisse to experiment broadly with the possibilities of the cut-out, as well as to indicate to him its potential seriousness as an independent medium. A related cut-out, *Le Dragon* (1943/44), shows how quickly he realized the fluid freedom possible in cut paper, as well as suggesting by its large scale the monumental size toward which Matisse was moving. That size first emerged in the two studies for decorative panels made in 1946, *Océanie, le ciel* and *Océanie, la mer*, each over 12 feet long, and in the tapestry studies of the same year, *Polynésie, le ciel*, and *Polynésie, la mer*. The latter are particularly interesting for several reasons. Each is composed of white shapes, in one case bird-related and in the other fish-related, arranged freely across a ground of two rows of five alternating dark and light blue rectangles. Each is bordered by a white cut-out framing pattern, the outer side of which is perfectly straight and parallels the edge of the entire composition at a remove of only an inch or two and the inner side of which is cut in an organic pattern reflecting the shapes that give the compositions their names. The blue grounds function at once as flat, geometricized foils for the white shapes moving across them and as aerial or aquatic infinities against which the shapes float. This double focus, as well as the contrast between the rigid rectilinearity of the ground and the open freedom of the white shapes and their relationships, suggests the double need for order and for freedom that characterizes most of the cut-outs, a dichotomy that recalls Matisse's struggle to reconcile pictorial and naturalistic scale in his paintings of the years between the World Wars. Although similar conflicting scale demands do exist in the cut-outs, particularly in the late monochrome works, they are avoided for the most part by the absence of the human figure. The scales of the recognizable objects and animals that do appear are much more easily manipulated to conform to the scales of the geometrical grounds—the pictorial scale—than a human shape would be. As Matisse himself seems to have come to realize, and as works such as *Le Dragon* show, the order imposed by the borders and backgrounds of the *Polynésie* studies, an order that helps keep the compositions from falling apart or running away, could also be given by color, particularly the high-keyed color employed in the cut-outs. This was a realization that offered the artist a final and triumphant way out of the differing demands placed on his representational art from the beginning, and one he himself had arrived at years earlier, only to drift away toward other concerns during the 1920's and '30's. In general, one can say that whenever an underlying or imposed geometry is too obtrusive or functions too rigidly to contain Matisse's freer forms, as a frame or otherwise, the compositions of the cut-outs suffer. The visual effect, as in some of the early dancers and in such works as *Compositon (Les Velours)* (1947), is of a shrivelling, a loss of scale, that emasculates the work.

The *Polynésie* studies are also of particular value in demonstrating the importance to Matisse's work of opacity—coloristic density—usually achieved through high-keyed color. One need only compare them to the tapestries made from them, the knotted surfaces of which encourage a softening of the color resulting from the subtle play of light and shadow

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produced by their irregularities, to realize their superiority as works of art and to know how much closer they are to Matisse's artistic sensibility. This is true in the case of every translation of a cut-out into another medium, despite the fact that the cut-outs were often designed for just such translations. Matisse himself realized this in relation to *Jazz*, the stencilled plates of which lack the vitality of the cut-out models, even though they were printed from the same inks with which the cut-out papers were washed. It is true even of the Vence chapel windows and their studies, the studies having a breathtaking and radiant power, particularly when exhibited together in the configuration of the chapel, that is wholly lacking in the atmospheric windows themselves. Just so, faded or modulated colors, such as appear in *Amphitrite* (1947) and *Silhouette, fond jaune* (1947), work against the cut-outs themselves.

The progress of the window studies for the Vence chapel, a project with which Matisse was occupied almost exclusively from 1948 until 1952, is telling in terms of the overall development of the cut-out within Matisse's *oeuvre* and in terms of his artistic objectives. The first study for the apse window (*Jerusalem Céleste*, 1948), twin tall, narrow, roundheaded forms, consists almost entirely of overlapping rectangles of color. This geometry is broken only at the top by two curving forms, one of which escapes from one half of the window to the other, echoing the roundness of the windows at that point. The second study (*Vitrail bleu pâle*, 1949), superimposes a group of the split-leaf rhododendron forms so dear to Matisse on top of an even more tightly organized geometrical substructure, while the final, executed version (*L'Arbre de vie*, 1949) abolishes the geometry altogether in favor of a substructure of tear-shaped, apparently leaf, forms on top of which float the rhododendron shapes, graded in size from bottom to top. Similarly, the nave and choir windows began with a wholly geometric design (*Les Abeilles*, 1948), but ended in a radically simplified pattern of regularized leaf shapes in blue, green, and yellow. Consisting of rows of tall, thin lights, the nave and choir windows are pulled together by a semicircular line at the top that continues from one light to another. This development is clearly an acknowledgement on Matisse's part that the geometry of the windows themselves was quite enough to organize their patterns, not to mention the brilliant, large-scale color patterns he created for them. The vitiating effect of transmitted light on the hue and, particularly, on the value contrasts so important structurally to Matisse's art makes the windows themselves much less satisfying than the paper studies for them. Whatever worked against opacity and differentiation worked to the detriment of Matisse's art.

The advantages of formal and coloristic clarity to Matisse are apparent in comparisons of several works created around 1950. The relatively small *Danseuse acrobatique* (1949/50) juxtaposes three black and seven white forms, all of them nongeometric and none touching another, on an orange ground. The only geometry present is the rectangle of the orange sheet on which the elements are composed, and that is violated by the extension of two of the black shapes beyond its edges. Here one sees not only the marvelous freedom characteristic of Matisse's best work, and his uncanny

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power to make of black a rich, velvety tonality, but his paramount ability to transform an action or shape into an abstract configuration that evokes its source with absolute fidelity while having almost no direct formal connection with it. Matisse's coloristic mastery and increasing willingness to violate the geometries he was fond of establishing are similarly apparent in *Les Mille et Une Nuits* of 1950. This extended lateral composition is in many ways reminiscent of the earlier *Composition (Les Velours)*, but whereas in the 1947 work the organic patterning is almost wholly contained by the sequence of rectangles used as its ground, the 1950 work not only allows the organic forms to move relatively freely over and through a similar geometrical sequence, but the geometry itself is varied, overlapped, and, in one place, completely broken through. Furthermore, the congruence between the series of geometric shapes and the proportions of the overall support is suppressed by a double row of brilliantly-colored heart shapes placed between the two. Finally, Matisse makes his color speak in a particularly eloquent way, livening a dull brown by placing it against orange, bringing out a middle value gray by placing black and white shapes on top of it and juxtaposing it with orange, etc. One sees here the inexorable strengths of Matisse's art beginning to assert themselves over and against some of his dearest compositional devices. In both *Danseuse acrobatique* and *Les Mille et Une Nuits* it is the absolute discreteness of the elements, conveyed by variation in hue and value, that gives the compositions their strength.

In *Les Bêtes de la Mer*, also of 1950, precisely the opposite effects take their toll. Composed of two columns of rectangles entirely contained within the vertical rectangle of the support, and, in turn, entirely containing the organic shapes superimposed on them, *Les Bêtes de la Mer* suffers from hues that are insufficiently intense (pale greens, for example, that cannot stand up to an intense purple) and that are occasionally sufficiently close in value to blur the distinctions between them. Paradoxically, the latter effect works to the advantage of *Fleurs de neige* (1951), since its background squares extend out to the edges of the support and the fact that they become close-valued merely unifies the ground over which the large leaf shapes move. The tendency in this work for both colors and shapes to exceed the boundaries set up to contain them opens it out into a large-scale expression entirely sympathetic to the ends of Matisse's art.

Two other works of about the same time show Matisse experimenting with positive-negative relationships by using not only cut-out shapes, but parts of the sheets from which they were cut (*La Vis*, ca. 1951), something he had done before to somewhat less effect and was to do again to greater effect, and with interpenetrations not only of his organic forms but between those forms and the geometrical grounds on which they appear (*Mimosa*, 1949/51). The result in the latter case is a compositional density which is saved from congestion only by the extreme differences of hue and value among the elements involved. In both cases there is an effect of shallow layering and an overall eccentric richness that were as far as Matisse was to go in this direction.

As if in reaction to the rich density of *Mimosa*, Matisse devoted a

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substantial part of the year 1952 to creating a series of nude figures executed entirely in blue cut paper on white grounds. These were his first cut-outs of the human figure in ten years, and are, as a group, his most problematical works in the medium. They are problematical not only because they eliminate the powerful color with which he had been working, and on which the cut-outs had so much depended for their effects, but because they revive the problems of scale the artist had had with the human figure in his paintings of the 1920's and 1930's. In the former respect, their problems are admirable, since they show Matisse setting new and stringent tasks for himself. In the latter respect, however, they represent the return of a difficulty that would have been better not revived, that of the clash between pictorial and naturalistic scale. The pictorial pressures created by the arrangements of abstracting blue forms against uninflected white grounds almost totally destroy the naturalistic viability of the figures represented, and that destruction results in a weakening of the pictures as a whole. This is particularly true of the compositions in which standing figures appear. Those devoted to crouching figures—right leg wrapped around raised left leg, right arm raised over the head—so far deform the body's normal relationships as to throw it entirely into the service of the pictorial needs. They are the best of the series, capable of projecting Matisse's old power and assurance. The most elaborate of the blue and white compositions, and almost certainly the best known, is *La Piscine*, a decorative environment achieved by running a horizontal band of white around the four walls of a room and composing within and around it a series of almost wholly abstract shapes in blue meant to represent or evoke the motions of swimmers. Of the two halves—the composition is interrupted midway on two opposite sides for door openings—that on the left as one enters and stands with one's back to the overdoor panel, called *Femmes et Singes*, is the more successful because its acrobatic shapes escape with more regularity from the white band running behind them, seeming to hurl themselves over its borders. This makes for a largeness of scale denied the more contained right side and very much to the qualitative advantage of the composition. The problem involved is, of course, precisely that of the other cut-outs in which organic shapes are placed over geometric grounds. Not only is an organized interplay between the geometry of the background and the openness of the organic forms not crucial to the success of these works, but the freer the arrangement of the forms and the more the organic escapes from and triumphs over the geometrical the better.

Nowhere are these problems better exemplified than in the two huge decorations created by Matisse in 1952/53, *La Négresse* and *Grande Décoration aux masques*. The former is one of Matisse's greatest works, a monumental masterpiece capable of holding its own with any creation in the history of art. The latter is a vast and impressive composition of noticeably less stature, its ultimate quality impaired by the severe geometry imposed on it. It is not, in this case, a matter of underlying geometrical structure, but of a patterning to which the quatrefoil flower forms, arranged in both vertical and horizontal rows, are subjected. Varied as that patterning may

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be by the different colors of the flowers and the eccentricity of their leaf shapes, it is still inhibitory to the expressive power of the whole. It is abetted in its constrictiveness by the blue columns containing the composition at its ends and by the central panel of five- and six-leaved blue flowers surrounded by a decorative border that imposes further symmetry, focussing the composition at the center. The central placement of each of the drawn human faces within the side panels of quatrefoil flowers emphasizes this symmetry even further. In *La Négresse*, on the other hand, the composition is so asymmetrical as to be antic, the huge, black, loping figure (of Josephine Baker) at the right played off against quatrefoil flower and split-leaf rhododendron shapes dispersed apparently at random around it. The forms are concentrated at the right and center of the composition, becoming sparser toward the left, their rhythm thereby lightening as one reads the cut-out from right to left. All the elements of which the forms are composed are uncontained by geometry and are presented against a plain white ground, and the "anatomical" forms are so abstracted, without in any way becoming unjust, as to obviate the naturalistic-pictorial scale problem altogether. In its simultaneous sensuous palpability and complete optical disembodiment, *La Négresse* represents the culmination of Matisse's art. It is an ebullient coda to the life's work of the 83-year-old master, of which most artists half his age, even those of first rank, would have been incapable.

In reviewing the growth and development of Matisse's cut-outs, and confronted with the joyous sensuousness they project, it is difficult to keep from sentimental evocations of the aged, ill, and dying artist confined to his bed but taking giant, confident artistic strides toward a new art form of daring originality and bold youthfulness. Such flights of fancy are, however, somewhat inhibited by the obvious comparison with Cézanne, an artist whose equally daring late style was couched not in open and immediately appealing terms, but in a visual and intellectual complexity that seems to remove it altogether from the realm of the human and approachable. Both artists had the Herculean ability to reconcile, or at least to bring into peaceful coexistence, seemingly opposite strains in their work. The clearest evidence of this in the work of each is their capacity to deal with naturalistic and pictorial scale, bending the former to the demands of the latter without abandoning the realistic forms so dear to them. In part because of this ability, the work of both artists projects a consummate intellectual power, an effect that depends in part also on their respective abilities to juggle consciously a seemingly infinite number of pictorial variables, bringing them together into harmonious compositions of apparent simplicity from which all semblance of struggle and effort has been refined away. Finally, both seem to have been extremely open to themselves and to the life around them, much as that openness may have been protected, in Cézanne's case at least, by a wall of gruffness in interpersonal relationships. The most important evidence for, and result of, that openness was an ability to accept the consequences of their art, its inexorable inner logic. This is evidenced in part in Matisse's *oeuvre* by a willingness, shared with the Impressionists, to accept as art what had

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not previously seemed to be art. In part, also, it is evidenced by an ability to stop when any given work declared itself to be finished rather than when it *looked* finished, an ability Matisse shared with Cézanne and one that results in the scruffiness, the look of still being worked on, of some of his finest works.

In considering the esthetic greatness suggested by these capacities, one is led to wonder by what process Matisse was able to arrive at such an extreme abstraction from nature while retaining in his works a profound sensuousness, and at his ability to transform his sensuous attachment to the world—to the sea, the sky, and the female body—into a visual sensuousness projected through color and shape. Happily, the means by which that transformation was effected, is illuminated by the speculations of Edward Bullough on esthetic distance (" 'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle," *British Journal of Psychology*, June 1912, pp. 87-118). The creative act, according to Bullough, is a process by which beginning with "real" affections, the artist engages in a dialogue with his medium through which the generating affections are distanced to the point at which they become esthetic, rather than "real," entities. Without losing their intensity or, necessarily, their character, perhaps even gaining in both, they are yet transformed by the substitution of one referent for another. Should this process not go far enough, one is left in the no-man's land between art and life in which exist works that are merely "agreeable"—or, in Pound's somewhat more evocative expression, "caressable." Should it go too far, all emotion is drained away and the result is a lifeless and academic artifact. The truly great artist is one able to distance his affections to precisely the proper point, a very fine adjustment indeed since, as Bullough observes, what is most desirable is *"the utmost decrease of Distance without its disappearance."* In clarifying this artistic mechanism, Bullough not only throws considerable light on the processes that govern esthetic quality, emphasizing the fine line that must be walked to produce works of high quality, but helps explain how so sensuous an art as that of Matisse can escape being "caressable." To quote him again, the "spiritual aspect of the appeal [of a work of art] is the more penetrating, the more personal and direct its sensual appeal would have been *BUT FOR THE PRESENCE OF DISTANCE.*" In his ability both to distance and to know when to stop, Matisse must be ranked among the very greatest masters not only of his own time but, like Cézanne before him, of all time.

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VERNON YOUNG

The Grotesque in Some Recent Films

I SHALL DISPENSE WITH ANY COMPLEX DEFINITION of the *grotesque* in art, simply noting that the term is often interchangeable with the merely incongruous, the impressively absurd or the sheerly monstrous. These distinctions are suggested by the context but they are determined by the attitude of the spectator. What to one man is a pleasing grotesquerie may to another appear a radical distortion.

My model instance of the true, *pleasing* grotesque is the final duel in *Barry Lyndon*:[1] the awesome setting, that churchlike granary; the relentless beat of the music (a Sarabande by Handel); the calculated pace at which the ceremony of vengeance proceeds; the shifting witness point of the camera; the doves gobbling and rustling among the rafters; the fearful antagonists: Lyndon, himself, sensing that Nemesis stands before him in the person of his stepson, Lord Bullingdon, with nervous pistol-hand and fleering smile twisted to a diagonal. Beatific shafts of light pierce the window-slits, as they had done in the church when Barry became Lyndon. The chortling doves are a mockery of the softly calling birds which had punctuated the spring morning of Lyndon's first duel, instrument for ejecting him into the world of Continental war, card-sharping and fortune-hunting. So the "affair of honor" marches to its close; Barry observes the gentleman's code of firing into the air and one shortly realizes, with a mixture of approval and revulsion, that his malevolent young opponent has no thought of sparing the hated stepfather who is in fact responsible for having made of a small, proud-angelic boy this weedy monster with trembling weapon and maniacal smirk. The Sarabande throbs; the damned doves chortle; Lord Bullingdon reloads while Lyndon sweats, trying to shield his profiled body with one shoulder and arm. The young man fires; the doves flutter and gobble in a reflex of panic; Lyndon drops to the floor, a cripple for the rest of his days. Satisfaction has been purchased and the Sarabande is over. By a masterful fusion of sound-and-image resources, Stanley Kubrick here managed a superb, protracted climax to his film that not only resolved the fate (settled the hash!) of Barry Lyndon but also restated and intensified that subtle spirit of the macabre with which the history of our corrupt hero had intermittently been visited.[2]

This was but one of many indelible passages in which a strong impression of the grotesque was achieved by Kubrick's concentration on the

[1] *Barry Lyndon* (U.S.A.-England); *Casanova* (Italy); *Providence* (England); *Elisa, Vida Mia* (Spain); *Pascal Duarte*, (Spain); *Obscure Object of Desire* (France-Spain); *The Serpent's Egg* (Sweden).

[2] Whether by kind accident or Kubrick's inspired design, both Bullingdon and Lyndon are left-handed—as if the younger, by psychic association, had inherited only the *sinister* equipment of the elder!

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solemnity with which disrupting events transpired, or on the odd contrast, wholly of the period, between the formality of the setting and the ghastliness or melancholy of what was being depicted: a regiment of brightly uniformed soldiers, absurdly confident, marching, totally exposed, across a flowered meadow, into the direct barrage from enemy cannon; the gouty Sir Charles Lyndon, sputtering about his wife's adultery, as the elegant voice, on track, formally announces his death by a stroke *before* we watch him, in actuality, expire; Lady Lyndon, from a Gainsborough canvas, having taken strychnine, writhing among the silks of her powder-blue-and-gold boudoir; the fury that erupts during the chamber-music recital when Lyndon, insufferably taunted by the stripling, Bullingdon, beats him nearly to death while the musicians pretend there has been no interruption and the screaming guests become a scrimmage.

The grotesqueness of an age is proportional to the contradictions it exhibits. In the eighteenth century, the most elegant possible style cohabited with extremes of affectation and casual brutalities. The Age of Reason was furnished with sense-defying opulence; its inhabitants cheated at cards, oppressed their women and committed suicide on the field of valor with equal fervor and decorum. All this is ground for acrid comedy, if you choose, and Kubrick, following Thackeray, but not too closely, so chose. The point I hope to make is that *Barry Lyndon*, a work of great beauty, striped with the bizarre, is substantiated by its historical location; it *takes place* in Europe of the 1700's. Fellini's *Casanova* mainly takes place in a wardrobe department at Cinecitta.

To a certain school of thought, this might be cause for belief in Fellini's superiority: the less a form owes to its origin in time and place, so runs their tune, the more it commends itself to our sophistication. Arguable: by no means irrefutable, and perhaps more securely demonstrated in the plastic arts or ballet. Theory to one side, the specific experience will stand or fall by the indulgence of the viewer. My case against Fellini is that the multi-colored balloons and papier-maché dreams he made sport of in his earlier films have increasingly become the substance of his later ones. The older he gets the more desperately he tries to recreate the fantasy world of his childhood and adolescence, forever pursuing the definitive clown, the block-buster carnival, the super-orgy, the Platonic Ideal of Breast and Buttocks. The accoutrements of *Barry Lyndon* were inseparable from the history of Barry Lyndon (character is fate, assisted in this case by social bigotry); in *Casanova*, accoutrement is virtually the subject. Where, among these bewildering, if dazzling effects—the wind-machines, the organs, the candle-chandeliers, the beauty patches and the wigs and the gondolas and the flesh-flesh-flesh of the bountiful and slutty women is there a shadow of contingent history or an apprehensible idea about character, either comically or fatally under stress?

Don Willis, praising Fellini in *Film Quarterly* (Summer 1977), had a half-hunch that Casanova was a projection of Fellini, himself, "a great mind, teeming with ideas, but all women want him for is his body. . . . It's his misfortune to be the Great Lover. It undermines his pretensions toward being the Great Thinker." This is dubious, not to say humorless! Of

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course, artists do enter the derangements of their characters, to some extent, but if I am to assume that Fellini has become an intolerable prima donna since the years in which I knew him I firmly doubt that he has any pretensions whatever to being a Great Thinker! Any identification of director and title actor in this charade strikes me as embarrassing; Donald Sutherland's Casanova, a dummy with hardboiled eyes, is very nearly as forbidding as that rouged Prince of Tübingen in *Barry Lyndon*, quite as grotesque as the carnival of animalia that surrounds him. Willis has a finer appreciation of the imagery in *Casanova*, moving thematically in season from "heat and life" towards "cold and death." This aspect is compelling. We shall not exaggerate if we conjecture that Fellini (like Orson Welles) is haunted by mutability and the last curtain call: the fireworks will die and the Grand Canal will freeze over. The question is whether or not one finds a discernible thematic unity sufficient compensation for the want of human stuff which should have been animating the spectacle. Albert Johnson, in the same issue of *Film Quarterly* (I like this idea of publishing opposed views simultaneously) finds it insufficient. "The splendid introduction piques the imagination but because hardly any identifiable trace of humanity or affection is to be seen as the film continues there remains only erotic titillation. Casanova's women are portrayed . . . as overripe, oversexed, tongue-wagging trolls . . . a legion of the damned or deformed, placed before us in a whirligig of 18th-century fantasies. . . ." Mr. Johnson has my agreement. These days, Fellini's view of the erotic in human equations is closer to scatology than to even a pardonably cynical reservation. As theater, *Casanova* is not much fun! When everything and everybody in a film is grotesque, our pleasure is diminished for want of the contrast which would accentuate the value of the grotesque when it unpredictably appeared.

Such a contrast was apparently intended as *raison d'être* of Alain Resnais' extremely distasteful and dilettantish made-in-England venture, *Providence*. The grotesque in this case arises *unintentionally* from the sorry wedding of Resnais' already dated tricks of time-and-placement—which never did say anything pregnant about the relativity of appearance and reality—with the intensely British dialogue of David Mercer, often ice-cold funny but too frequently obscene, as if Mercer had been working off a nasty-mindedness unacceptable to his habitual employer, the BBC. In quick synopsis, the idea sounds snappy. We are shown the behavior of an aging writer's son, daughter-in-law and Other Woman (intercut frenetically with rumblings and ramblings from the writer himself, bedpan level) and, when we are more than ready to conclude that the embroilment is a nest of vipers and that the son, especially (acted by Dirk Bogarde with poisonous finesse!), is unmitigatedly worthless, we are given to discover that what we have been seeing is untrue, solely the malicious interpretation of the novelist-father for a book he is writing. Not a half-bad conception but Resnais directs it as camp, warping a narrative depicted on two levels of reality with silly interjections of characters who are not *really* in the scene as given, and in one shot, anxiously recapping his antecedent association with the Robbe-Grillet tribe, he mocks up a back-projection of oceanic

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waves that never break (the settings are otherwise rendered naturalistically!). To assist the general incongruity—I do not say to enhance it!—the two women are unaccountably played by American actresses, vocally among the worst, hence suffering a major handicap when sounding off, uninflected and nasal, among the pound-note accents of Dirk Bogarde, David Warner and Sir John Gielgud—though God knows, Gielgud's senile-silver voice is not all that endearing when asked to murmur copious wormy lines about his bowels and his kidneys, soliloquies rigged, I gather, to be disenchanting: the harsh pathos of our failing chemistry. My personal impression of an experience tawdry, vicious and un-playfully schematic was not dispersed by the gentle resignation of the ending. In this event I should have preferred Fellini's gold dust, his baroque organs and the chandeliers ascending and descending.

An even more gratuitously baffling chronology is provided by *Elisa, Vida Mia*, of Carlos Saura. If finally incomprehensible, as Resnais' film is not, the whole *is* more agreeable than the sum of its parts, as Resnais' work is not! Saura does have a certain respect for his milieu and, as we have seen before, an obsessively trenchant gift for recalling the woes and hungers of childhood and their traumatic reappearance in maturity. I think he has exploited this yield to its limits—in *The Garden of Delights, La Prima Angelica, Cria Cuervos*—and now repeats himself, precariously (like Resnais, Fellini or Bergman), the more so when he resorts to involutions of narrative that alienate one's attention when he might better be securing it. This film *appears* to resume the prolonged visit of young Elisa (Geraldine Chaplin) to her self-exiled but doting father (Fernando Rey), living in isolation somewhere on the Castilian plains—while writing a book! (is this a trend or merely a coincidence?), during which period she deceives and undeceives herself about her rupturing marriage and her past relationship to her father. *But does she*? For, after the halfway mark, notably, it is quite impossible to know (I challenge anyone!) *who* is experiencing *what* at a given moment—including inserts of ghoulish murder and incestuous embrace—how many roles Miss Chaplin is assuming (a further amplification of Saura's strategy in *Cria Cuervos*) or if, indeed, at least half the scenario is not a hallucination produced by her father's notes-towards-a-fiction. For my refusal to leave the cinema betimes, outcast by Saura's aggressively devised problems of continuity, Geraldine Chaplin and Fernando Rey were largely responsible. Except for moments when uncharitably molested by their director, they engaged me with their gentility and their genuine air of troubled kinship. To have become as indifferent, as Saura has, to our grasp of what he has to say about characters whom he seems to have created with some affection is grotesque in a decisively negative reading of the term.

I suspect that he is divided between his native cast of temperament and a diehard international fashion: compulsively to interrupt logical sequence, even when the scenario as first conceived carries no such justification. This species of anxiety is not a normal ingredient of his countrymen's artifice (Dali and Arrabal notwithstanding). As in their traditional paint-

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ing, so today in their cinema, the Spanish *are* masters of a slant, incisive viewpoint for which the word, *grotesque*, may be a deficient modifier when sardonic—or just breath-takingly cruel—would be on target. (Cf. the "Last Supper," with Hallelujah chorus, in Buñuel's *Viridiana*, and the hair-raising terminal scenes of Saura's *The Hunt* and *Anna and the Wolves*!) What I like to think of as Spanish grotesque at its most pure, in a line of descent from, say, Velásquez (too easy to evoke Goya) may be experienced in the most remarkable film from post-Franco Spain (which *I* have seen, at any rate), *Pascal Duarte* (1975), from a novel by Camilo Cela which, in turn, was reputedly based on the life story of a peasant executed for double murder in 1937.[3]

Born in 1902, Pascal Duarte was raised in an atmosphere of extreme poverty and paternal despotism. His life became a series of compensatory and futile acts of violence in reaction to successive calamities, the justice of which he failed to understand (beginning early with his drunken father's assaults on his mother). When his sister, aged 16, goes to Trujillo to work as a whore and his father dies from drinking ethyl alcohol, Pascal, in a stupor of revenge, shoots his dog. And when his wife, Lola, whom he had met in the Trujillo whorehouse, is killed by a fall from a mule, in a sudden frenzy he kills the mule. For his most direct action, the murder of his sister's pimp, he is imprisoned. But the Peoples' Front amnesty of 1936 frees him to return to his village—which is to say, to nothing, save the vexing company of his mother, sole accusing witness, he dully believes, to his frustrated life. Carefully loading a gun, he blows her off her chair as she sits at table with him. Next he goes to the estate of the local *padron* (the Franquists have again taken over the village) and murders Don José, evidently seeing him as the general author of his misfortunes. (Ironically, within the given patriarchal system, Don José was no tyrant and had been notably kind to the Duarte family.) Pascal, at the last by no means stoical but squealing like a clubbed rabbit, is dragged rather than escorted to his execution. In the full closeup that ends the film, unsparing and livid, the executioner twists the garotte which chokes off the wretched man's uncomprehending existence.

Whatever opinion the director (Franco by name!—*Ricardo* Franco) may have entertained towards the social forces or the social apathy which impelled Pascal, stage by stage, to seal his own fate, his treatment is commendably dispassionate. The essential contours of a life repeat the arid contours of landscape and dwelling: parched fields with open places of rock, forever rumpled by wind; adobe houses, lantern-lit, scant-furnished; windows without glass, only wooden grills; doorframes without doors, just towel-like drapes. Structure and occasion echo one another. Image of despair, Pascal squats on the floor of his cell with its barred window, head hanging, arms extended between his upraised knees. Later,

[3] The film was noteworthy to Spanish critics because, after years in which official censorship had banished from the cinema all but the Castilian tongue, it employed, accurately, a regional dialect, that of Estramadura.

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back home, he sits in the same way against the wall of his house, another barred window above. After killing Don José, he again slumps into this suggestively embryonic position.

Pascal Duarte is a reminder of the latent ethical austerity in much Iberian art. As John Moffat has put the case in his brief but comprehensive study, *Spanish Painting* (Studio Vista, 1973):

> . . . one must look behind the superficial carnage and revulsion to find the persistent strain of a moral rigour and an essentially stoic and impassive, objectivized narration which elevates the subject beyond what may seem mere sensationalism.

This will not serve as an adequate description of Luis Buñuel's cinema. While Buñuel may sometimes leave a total inference to the viewer's interpretation, he is not characteristically *impassive*! He edits his scenarios with Satanic glee and a visual glossary all his own. Buñuel has flavored his national propensity for black humor with a worldly independence of the special conditions which have hedged his stay-at-home countrymen under Franco. I am happily able to confess that against my hardening resistance to him his *Obscure Object of Desire* (freely adapted from a novel by Pierre Louys) has recaptured my interest: an altogether droll and inventive film, crucially relevant to our suicidal zeitgeist but composed with a legerity which has not of late been customary *chez* Buñuel.

The affair opens with disarming suavity as Matthieu (Fernando Rey once again, every inch the foolish gentleman) buys a ticket to Madrid, en route to Paris, ostensibly escaping from his importunate mistress (Conchita, so help me!) who follows him to the train where, with a sudden swerve into farce, he dumps a bucket of water over her. But the Buñuel grotesque is properly introduced when, prepared to explain his action, and a great deal of his life, to a compartment-full of sympathetic listeners, a *dwarf* among them is identified as a psychiatrist! The remainder is Matthieu's confession of his repeated irresolution when called upon in the name of self-respect to rid himself, once for all, of this impenitently treacherous female. What the audience in the railway carriage does *not* know is that as he tells his flashback story the girl *we* see changes visible identity from episode to episode (i.e. the "same" character is played by two actresses), without Matthieu ever being aware of the difference!

The settings are the solid-seeming, spacious cities of Europe: Seville, Madrid, Lausanne, Paris—expensive restaurants, luxury hotels where Matthieu tips lavishly, is polite to all underlings and in exchange is milked, insulted, mugged and outraged, while on the periphery the scum of the earth robs, kidnaps and blows up the ambassadors of this urbane world. Suave, diffident towards the violence which explodes in his traces, Matthieu pursues his own obsession, the double-Conchita, fully as destructive as—in fact in league with—the hoodlum "revolutionaries" who are destroying the city of cultivated man. Matthieu tips his hat to a woman nursing a pig instead of a baby, as if such things were part of the normal scene. (Buñuel's menagerie is otherwise limited in this film to a

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mouse in a trap, a fly in a glass of wine.) Upon arriving in Madrid, Matthieu is reconciled, for at least the fifth time, with his Conchita II but as the film ends they are bickering in Paris as a shop is blown up behind them. If we take time to reflect that Buñuel has been saying much the same thing since *Viridiana* it is cause for congratulation that he can still find telling variations on his theme, and matter for wonder that the nihilists in his audience who think he's on their side never catch up with their own image, which he never fails to project, far this side idolatry. *Obscure Object of Desire* is the best film joke of the year.

Ingmar Bergman's *The Serpent's Egg* is one of the worst. *Grotesque*, here, is insufficient, save as an oblique synonym for *preposterous*. To believe, ever, that Bergman has anything acute to say about man as a political animal, is rank delusion. Buñuel, as persistently single-minded as Bergman, proves to have a more worldly sense of evil. Not only can he distinguish between the *predatory* and the *victimized* poor-in-heart, he has always understood that man *demands* an Anti-Christ. To Bergman, the Devil is abroad, for his teleology is of the nineteenth century, and beyond! He requires a scapegoat for his manufactured martyrs because they reflect himself and he has a rooted fear of facing up to the diverse sources of human frailty; closer to the mark, he has a conditioned Swedish inability to acknowledge such sources. People are a mess because they have lost God (he can't quite bring himself to accept Social Democracy as a surrogate!) and, for reasons he fails to locate, they have been *imposed upon* by diabolical agency.

Who, except a brain-washed Swedish journalist, can accept this film as taking place in Berlin of 1923 (about which Bergman knows bloody nothing) instead of (like all his late efforts) in the director's frightened head? Who can accept Rosenberg either as the scion of a rich Jewish family in Italy *or* as an ex-circus-performer? (Cf. *The Shame*, where a Rosenberg was an ex-cellist!) Why is Rosenberg otherwise an American except that Bergman hired an American actor to secure himself a U.S.A. box-office? What justification in the script is there for believing that the predicament of Abel (why not Cain, since he is driven, by no coherent cause, to *anti-Semitic* gestures?) and of Manuela is induced by the post-Versailles inflation? These two relate neither to each other nor to the historical moment in which it is pretended they exist. Rosenberg is a broken-down lush about whom we know next to nothing, since he knows precious little about himself. (Someone in the film remarks that Abel is not given to loquacity; an alibi for Bergman's failure to contrive dialogue for him.) Who can believe in Liv Ullman as pure-hearted cabaret backwash doing a feeble travesty of Marlene Dietrich (or was it Lisa Minelli?), simultaneously over-working in a factory and in a spare moment visiting a priest? (This interlude was surely intended for another movie!) And who can swallow the idiotic Dr. Vergerus (cf. the scientist in *The Magician*, the architect-Pilate in *A Passion*, the husband in *The Touch*) as a credible proto-Nazi, already in 1923 conceiving a Master Race, rather than as another target for Bergman's blind and juvenile anti-intellectualism? What is the point (I do not ask the *meaning*) of that vile penultimate scene involving an

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impotent Negro copulating with a German whore, save as final evidence of Bergman's coarseness, his artistic bankruptcy, his sophomoric sense of sin, his misgiving that he had not been sufficiently explicit about the degeneracy of life under the Weimar regime? . . . Not for Bergman to show us fear in a handful of dust. He requires a mountain of manure.[4]

[4] On press. It's worth a postscript to note that *The Serpent's Egg* had its premiere in Stockholm shortly after that of Joseph Losey's *Mr. Klein*, a shadowy and subtle analysis of muted anti-Semitism in Paris of the German Occupation. Bergman's movie was praised without let or hindrance, yet not a single critic found a comparison with Losey's inevitable. Such an essay in the art of discrimination, had it been attempted with the requisite common sense, could only have been prejudicial in Losey's favor. . . . Reviews of *The Serpent's Egg* from other countries were not forthcoming when I wrote mine, above.

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ROBERT GARIS

Croce Recognized

BOOKS STILL MATTER. *Afterimages,*[1] Arlene Croce's selection of her dance criticism since 1966 to the present, mainly from *Ballet Review, The Dancing Times* and *The New Yorker*, has given Croce what only book-format can give—the right degree of recognition. A lot of us have thought for some time that Croce is about the best reviewer writing about any of the arts. Now, after the publication and the reviews of *Afterimages*, that opinion can be taken for granted.

Croce's pre-eminence doesn't have or want the volume of a "major voice" and she doesn't happen to want to speak for any new movement or school of dance. You sense that she would rather enliven the dance scene than dominate it. Yet she has great authority in the exciting way her life-sized voice creates the illusion of embodying and speaking for the best audience there is. You want to belong to that audience. She couldn't create such an illusion if she weren't a first-rate writer and this is perhaps her greatest distinction. She has fine taste and sound judgment and she knows a lot, but what really draws you to her, into membership in her audience, is her stylishness, her style. She has Pauline Kael's verve without her vulgarity. Croce is tough and witty, she likes to be, because that supports her when she wants to take flight: "A week after the premiere [of *Chaconne*] I saw another performance. There was such euphoria onstage and in the pit that the final chaconne, loose ends and all, came together and held as if by miracle, and stars, demis, corps, orchestra, and audience were wafted together into Tiepolo skies." The little notation about Tiepolo is characteristic of the easy range and accuracy of her sensibility. She likes to lose her temper because it keeps her from sounding sanctimonious when she's attacking, and because she believes (mostly with justification) that she can lose her temper without losing her head or her eye. She rethinks things alively but often without telling you what she's doing: on April 1, 1974 she magically evokes the atmosphere of Cunningham's Westbeth "events" but by March 10, 1975 she is seriously worried about how much we're losing when these "events" don't show us the unity and identity of Cunningham's individual pieces. When she does a big historical job on *The Sleeping Beauty* it feels fresh because it comes from a writer's instinct for what her audience needs to know. As she moves easily from ballet to modern dance to movies to the World's Professional Ballroom Dancing Championships, it's not unlike accompanying Shaw through the musical world of the late nineteenth century, and when I call Croce a superb journalist I have the Shavian standard in mind.

In making judgments Croce produces a fairly familiar map of the dance scene which at the same time comes through as highly personal. Her judgments are very strong yet somehow she doesn't seem quite at ease

[1] AFTERIMAGES, by *Arlene Croce*. Knopf. $12.95.

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about the judging part of the critical enterprise. When she jokes about Balanchine and Graham, "George and Martha, parents of the American movement in choreography," or when she gives Twyla Tharp the final accolade by connecting her with "Mr. B. and Merce," the offhand tone is a cool way of showing respect. Mostly she shows her respect for the great figures even more coolly, by being pretty tough on them. Her superb retrospective piece on Graham is a *tour de force* since it presents Graham as a genius while identifying only the three big works of the early forties (*Letter to the World, Deaths and Entrances* and *Appalachian Spring*) as first-rate and finding even in *Deaths and Entrances* the "beginning of the turn toward the symbolic and the second-rate that was completed in the fifties." I came in on Graham in the late forties with *Cave of the Heart*, which I loathed, and perhaps it was that first reaction that has kept me from discovering the first-rateness in the earlier pieces. But Croce must have come in on Graham at an even later stage, and I admire the power of concentration, the poise of discrimination, it took to discover the freshness of the earlier pieces in the middle of the suffocating portentousness of all the later work which, in her witty indictment, " 'means' only one thing (what it says in the program)."

With Balanchine Croce's coolness doesn't bespeak lack of respect for the later work, far from it. It's a little hard to catch the motive. Partly she doesn't want to be a groupie—I respond to that, myself often uneasy about my Balanchinolatry. Partly she thinks him great enough to take all she can hand out. But sometimes her severity about Balanchine's aberrations seems censorious instead of critical, and occasionally it is loudly excessive and she then gets the balance wrong and seems to be writing from a double standard.

Or is this just an accident of the oddity of the dance scene, where there's such a yawning gap between the excitement great choreography can give and the tiny amount of it around? A dance critic must feel stingy, bad-mouthing the bad new pieces month after month, and perhaps that's what's responsible for the slight sense of double standard in Croce's work. She prefers to lose her temper or to be too generous rather than sound like a weighing and considering judge. Compare her lambasting of Balanchine for having damaged the last act of *Coppélia* with bad decor and costumes with the kid-glove treatment she gives Tudor's recent *The Leaves are Fading* or Robbins' recent *Ma Mère L'Oye*. Croce is right that the decor and several of the costumes in the last act of *Coppélia* are terrible and that they hide some of this "beautifully proportioned suite of allegorical dances" but Act III *Coppélia* remains infinitely more exciting and important than either the Tudor or the Robbins. And that point really gets lost. Then there's Croce's treatment of Ashton. After a lot of small discussions and a couple of big ones (about *Monotones* and *A Month in the Country*), I come away with no clear idea why she finds Ashton interesting. I don't finally believe she does find him interesting. I believe she finds him *real*, not fake; and the same with *The Leaves are Fading* and *Ma Mère L'Oye*. And she writes at length about these boring pieces because much of the other recent work of these two choreographers has not been real, and she is truly moved to see the survival of the genuine in their work. But the value of the pieces themselves gets exaggerated all the same.

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It is pleasure in the genuine, perhaps, that slightly inflates and disfigures Croce's writing about Twyla Tharp and Paul Taylor. These fine choreographers are real, genuinely talented, and they are also very prolific, and it's happening right now. Perhaps it's Croce's excitement about this, coupled with the oddity of the dance scene, that explains the faintly over-elaborate fussiness of her extensive writing about these two artists. When Croce loses her sense of economy, her cool, you suspect special pleading. In the long continued discussion of Tharp that goes on throughout *Afterimages*, I hear too much about space and time and popular art and high art and the classical, I hear unusual backings and fillings in judgment—I hear signs of over-protective anxiety. But Croce is so good that I must say all this tentatively. So far, *Sue's Leg* and the country music pieces are the only things of Tharp's that seem to me first-rate; other dances actually seem coarse or stale, rather than puzzling. But I can imagine myself discovering Tharp one of these days, and in Croce's terms. Likewise with her high praise of Bournonville, which goes far beyond anything I have ever felt in the theatre: I have an uneasy sense that she might be right about this famous and increasingly visible old master, partly because her praise depends so much on the way dance vocabulary is organized into dance structures, for which she has an acute eye. In this central concern Croce really does have authority. But she has authority everywhere. When we disagree, I'm not easy until I figure out why, and often not even then.

We disagree most widely about the development of Suzanne Farrell's dancing during the last fifteen years, and its relation to the state of the New York City Ballet during that period. I'm not sure that I can present this disagreement in ways that will be illuminating to the general reader but I find it irresistible to try. For since both Croce and I find Farrell the most exciting dancer before the public now, our two widely divergent conceptions of how she arrived seem promising material to examine if you're thinking of how different critics respond to the same scene.

Some facts about Farrell aren't in dispute. By 1965, at nineteen, she had become the prima ballerina of the company to a degree and in a way that hadn't happened before, with Tallchief or LeClercq. Balanchine's imagination was dominated by Farrell's image between *Movements* in 1963 and her departure from the company in 1969; he wanted to see her in virtually every role he had ever created. So Farrell danced roles which didn't particularly suit her, and therefore one saw painfully less of other dancers (such as the great Violette Verdy) who would have been more suited to those roles. This produced a continuous sense of crisis in company morale which the dancers with gallows humor used to call, as if it were a disease, Farrellitis; their inevitable sense of suffering by being neglected or rejected by their great master. But this crisis was nothing compared to the situation produced when certain grotesquely ironic actions and counteractions led to Farrell's departure from the company in 1969. Now, with Balanchine still dominated by Farrell's image but with no actual Farrell on hand to embody it, we continued to see certain ballets which were hard to drop from the repertory (the popular hit *Jewels,* the avant-garde masterpiece *Movements* to Stravinsky's new score, the expensive and to Balanchine personally meaningful *Don Quixote*), but which contained huge roles made expressly for Farrell's technique, roles that could not be danced ade-

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quately by anyone else and which therefore were danced very inadequately indeed. Inevitably, the quite limited dancers whom Balanchine had chosen to replace and "embody" Farrell emerged as principals whom in turn one saw too often in the major roles of the standard repertory. But the company managed some very distinguished events during this period and it can be claimed as a fact that when Farrell returned to the company in 1975 things speedily righted themselves in almost all the respects in which they had gone wrong.[2]

Croce's response to this drama was very intense and impassioned, as was mine, but what she differs strikingly from what I saw. Here is her view in 1968:

> The break came in the Rondo alla Zingarese movement of the Brahms-Schönberg Quartet. . . . Farrell apparently decided, or was encouraged, to play for powerful climaxes and sexiness on a big scale. This wasn't inappropriate, but soon it began to seem as if this role had become the expressive norm for her entire repertory. One now saw, in almost every part, the same worked-up shape to every phrase, everything delivered with utmost impact, no subtlety, no coherence. One saw a formerly fluid line distorted for maximum dynamic thrust in every direction, continual flaunting and flailing through the spine and neck, limp wrists, dismissive hands. Worse than this, there were movements that were repeated from ballet to ballet, whether they belonged there or not: simple arabesques were converted into extreme arabesques penchées (in, for example, the second movement of *Concerto Barocco,* where the distortion was blatant), and I was astounded to see her kick her hand (in a grand battement) even as Terpischore in *Apollo.*

And here is Croce's version of the years while Farrell was away, from a 1975 piece called "Farrell and Farrellism":

> For many of the dancers who got chances after she left, the Farrell image in all its negative aspects has become rigidified as a norm—even intensified as a norm. Karin von Aroldingen and Sara Leland and Kay Mazzo are much worse than Farrell ever was: they're caricatures of the caricature she had become. Beside their wild strained excesses, the Farrell of today looks almost conventional. . . . Swinging pelvises, baling-hook arms, clawing hands have become the new, cruel orthodoxy, and there's a whole cluster of young girls in the corps—thin, long-limbed girls who look hysterically overbred: the ultimate degeneration of what might be called the Farrell strain. Penelope Dudleston is one of these girls. All hinges and splays, she dances the Siren in *The Prodigal Son* with a peculiar, dehumanized force. That is to say, she has no force at all—just a limp, terrifying presence. . . . The great breeding cycle of

[2] A particularly eerie example of Balanchine's need to create replicas of Farrell came in 1970 when, in the first three movements of the *Tchaikovsky Suite No. 3,* we saw three different impersonations of Farrell by three infinitely lesser dancers. I don't suppose Balanchine will ever satisfy my curiosity by showing this ballet with Farrell dancing all three of those movements, but I'd give a lot to see it.

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which Farrell's early NYCB phase was a part has long since run its course and is now exhausting itself in mutations.

Now this brilliant writing, electrifying in its passion and power and in its intimations of cataclysm, makes sense to me in only one respect—it does match the importance of what was in fact taking place. We were indeed watching a "great breeding cycle" which, far from having exhausted itself in mutations, lives on in the current New York City Ballet style. The rest of Croce's account I must simply contradict. From the beginning Farrell was puzzling because she seemed the greatest dancer you had ever seen, yet you didn't feel in contact with an intelligence, a studying, working mind behind this dancing. There were some uncaring, uninvolved performances when you realized that she wasn't concentrating whatever it was she *did* concentrate when things went well; but these performances weren't seriously disturbing and could not rationally cause the sense of loathing Croce felt. As for the "new, cruel orthodoxy," this is both a qualitative and a quantitative exaggeration: these were not the hideous movements Croce suggests, one did not see them everywhere, and one saw them for the far less melodramatic and systematic reasons that I have described. Dudleston's Siren, and those hysterical mutants that accompany Dudleston in Croce's inflamed imagination, were in no respect representative of the company at that time.

Contradictions like these can't be resolved. They can be instructive, though, if you can figure out what differences in interests and tastes they come from, and these contradictions have taught me something about Croce's interests and strengths, and something about the inevitable concomitants of these strengths. I've also learned not very flattering things about myself.

The particular strength at issue here is Croce's demandingly accurate eye and her virtually moral sense for fidelity of style and of form. In an interesting aside in the general indictment of Farrell she says that "the concept of differences in ballet was in general collapse, and one couldn't blame Farrell for what the company failed to teach her." This is a perfectly intelligible idea to me, and indeed I imagine myself as fairly sensitive to such differences. And when I realize ruefully that I not only didn't mind those arabesques penchées in *Concerto Barocco* back in 1968 but that I didn't even realize that I was seeing them, I must accept the fact that I am not highly sensitive to the separate identity of even a work that means as much to me as *Concerto Barocco*. How could I not have seen that Farrell's 135 degree arabesque didn't have the effect of just neatly clearing the bodies of the girls bending over around her but instead traveled way over them? and how couldn't it have occurred to me to wonder whether this didn't go against the decorum of the piece? One of the ballet photographs I have known longest is of just this plain arabesque, precisely *not* a high arabesque penchée, danced by Marie Jeanne in the original costumes for *Concerto Barocco*—where were my eyes? Though I never saw Farrell actually kick her hand in *Apollo,* why didn't I notice that her toe was up there where it might kick her hand?

Croce's indictment of Farrell is part of an indictment of the critics who were too lazy to pay attention to Farrell's deterioration. My failure to

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register those arabesques penchées was a lazy failure of attention, of capacity too, perhaps, but also of interest. When I recently watched videotapes of Farrell's late sixties *Concerto Barocco* and *Apollo,* I saw that I had been lazy, yes, but also that I had been blinded to Farrell's revision of the decorum of these roles by what was powerfully right and wonderful in her dancing. I should have cared more about the differences in ballets. But then Croce's attention to these differences was blinding her to what Farrell was doing, and to what was in fact a large change in Balanchine's sense of style and technique which he was expressing chiefly through Farrell.

That Croce was in fact blind to this seems undeniable. In "Farrell and Farrellism," dated February 3, 1975, Croce wrote that Farrell used to be a "superdiva who distorted every one of the roles she danced except those with distortions already written in," and one must simply ask what she can possibly have meant by that second "distortions"? Croce doesn't now see the configurations of body and balance in *Don Quixote* or *Meditation* or *Diamonds* as distortions—now she sees the immense expansion of Balanchine's sense of scale and balance made possible partly through Farrell. (She's still worried, though; when she first saw *Chaconne* she saw the difference in scale between the Farrell-Martins variations and the final chaconne as a "blur," though later, as in the passage I quoted above, it all "came together and held as if by miracle.") But earlier she had been so hostile to the whole breeding cycle that she in fact refused to see that *anything* was going on in one of the great roles Balanchine made for Farrell in those "bad" years. About *Diamonds,* Croce wrote in 1967 that the ballet was "all imminently burgeoning climax. The climax never showed." But the minute she saw Farrell dance *Diamonds* after her return, she called the ballet, in a piece dated February 24, 1975, "a riveting spectacle about the freest woman alive." Croce now sees Farrell as "a changed and immeasurably enriched dancer" who "in stepping back into *[Diamonds]* has discovered it." But I think it is Croce who at last, in 1975, discovered the *Diamonds* we had all seen in 1967. Her fine, quick sense of the differences in ballet had blinded her to what Farrell was achieving in the great breeding cycle Balanchine was superintending.

Let me add, finally, that although Croce's praise of Farrell is now ample and as powerfully and illuminatingly expressed as you'd expect from this superb writer, nevertheless to call Farrell an "immeasurably enriched dancer" doesn't quite get it right. The change has been mysterious. If before she left the company Farrell almost never gave you the impression that there was a thinking, feeling, studying and working mind behind her dancing, now she seems entirely to have skipped that stage of development. What I feel now is something I have not felt before in the theatre; not a thinking, planning mind, but a most mysteriously controlling spiritual presence, quiet but with immense impact. And when I say that I feel this presence not only in *Monumentum* or *Chaconne* or *Diamonds* (where it's hard to miss) but also in *Tzigane* and *Allegro Brillante*—and even in *Union Jack*—then I must simply accept the disbelief I will get. And one measure of Croce's authority is that I'd certainly like to know how she reacts to this idea.

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Reviews

DEAN FLOWER

The Way We Live Now

IT MAY BE JUST A COINCIDENCE, but recent fiction exhibits a curiously persistent anxiety about the mass media. Novel after novel records not just the omnipresence of television, movies, newspapers, and radio but the ominous way they now filter into our lives and define our identities. It seems no longer to be a threatened invasion or even a Big Brother domination of our privacy, but rather a question of whether we still behave as if the private self—idiosyncratic, individual, with a mind of its own—has any real meaning at all. In the books discussed below we meet a famous journalist who discovers his complete betrayal and abdication of the private self; a famous television host who confesses himself an utter fraud, by means of a tape recorder; a successful novelist who undercuts the glib entertainment of the very media in which he exists; a youth whose actor-parents have substituted their stereotyped Hollywood roles for everything personal; a trio of Memphis kidnappers whose dreams and schemes all derive from movie and television illusions; a gaggle of Londoners who walk through violence and suffering as if it were a farce staged for television; a spy so self-estranged that even his innermost private life is a cover story; an elderly couple who run a phone-in radio program for Golden Agers.

What seems to be at issue here is the very basis of individuality, the belief that we have such a thing as a unique and sacredly-private self. Very few of the above characters have any such belief. Mainly, they are not hypocrites or the alienated or inhibited. If they were, we might discover in them some suffering inner self that had been pressed into exile or retreat; they might be "embattled" or "divided," as we like to put it. Instead, the theme of these fictions announces, by and large, that we have sold out our private lives without quite realizing it and adopted sterile formulas of self, especially those promulgated by the media. If the announcement is premature, it still gives a salutary chill. Without our own imagination and creative energy, how quickly a life becomes a rerun.

Richard Stern's tenth book is a Herzogian meditation on death, heartache, and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to.[1] Its hero is the paunchy Fred Wursup, a literate tough-cookie journalist who has survived divorce, best-sellerdom, and enough self-doubt to suggest he's a more complex—and more tender—human being than his glib, sharp-edged journalism has so far revealed to the American public. He has capitalized on the world's problems with such titles as *Down the American Drain* and

[1] NATURAL SHOCKS, by *Richard Stern*. Coward, McCann & Geoghegan. $8.95.

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The Big Thought and the Big Bang, and now he has his pick of magazine assignments. Adept at self-effacement, he gets people to open up, friends and strangers alike, then skewers them in print. Here's how a quondam friend gives Wursup the same treatment:

> Fred Wursup himself looks harmless as a clam. Dark, hefty, balding, brown-eyed, he's the sort of man you know for years without remembering. Like a con man or a great photographer, he blends into scenery. His real existence is at his Smith-Corona. Those who've felt Wursup's bite can hardly relate it to the genial mollusc who interviewed them.

But Wursup has tired of his old methods and taken on a lengthy review of books about death. "Death enriches thought," he discovers; "Death sits on life." Yet for all his pondering of *Todangst,* Kubler-Ross, Bushido Death, Thanatology, *Les Oraisons Funèbres* and the like—"he swam in death texts"—he finds the subject silences him. Death makes the genial mollusc clam up.

The novel hovers on this fatal discrepancy between the experience of suffering and writing about it. Our mortality, Stern seems to say, remains irreducibly private. Wursup interviews an oddball Hollywood director whose apparent flamboyance contrasts sharply with a personal secrecy. The director's body suggests Giacometti, a Grünewald Christ to the label-loving journalist. After some prying questions, however, Wursup gets an agonized glimpse of the private Hamish Blick, and is ashamed of himself. A few years later Blick commits suicide, the only perfect disappearance possible, its seems, given modern investigative reporting. Still researching death, Wursup interviews a dying teen-ager and falls helplessly into her pathetic experience. But all he can say to her at last is, "How hard for you," the same inadequate words he spoke to Blick. In a parallel action Wursup goes to Rome to interview an old friend whose political fortunes depend on correcting his image. Wursup does the job, but that ends their friendship. Like the story that prompted the "correction," journalism becomes Wursup's fiction in which the personal and complex truth yields to verbal cosmetics, betrayals.

Reflecting Wursup's contradictory verbal skill and inarticulate sympathy, the language of his meditation has a nervous, compacted, allusive intelligence that engages us constantly and yet ends by forestalling closeness. For all his words, it's hard to locate the real Wursup. Successfully emerged (by his own account) from an "amicable" divorce, he still keeps field glasses handy so he can spy into his old apartment nearby from the roof above his new place. He has replaced his believable wife Suzanne with a kooky mistress, Sookie Gumpert, an improbable earth goddess with a Ph.D. in geology to prove it. But in Europe our aimless journalist samples occasional women like a jaded tourist trying one or two new restaurants. Nowadays, any woman will do, it seems; it's only an anonymous appetite. And with that surrender goes everything. The novel is searching, full of counter-commentaries, and melancholy, without any Herzogian celebration to end it.

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Wilfred Sheed leers from the dust-jacket of his ninth novel, savoring a mean-looking cigar.[2] If these are *his* confessions (and what novel isn't, at some level, autobiographical?), he's totally unrepentant about them. The picture confirms the novel's final impression. It has all been an elaborate but transparent hoax. Sheed's stand-in narrator purports to be an Anglo-American television celebrity, Monty Chatworth, who has somehow outstripped Carson and Frost and become the "patron saint of Biafra and Bangladesh, and the greatest fund raiser since the invention of leprosy." But Chatworth has only been chatting, albeit feverishly, into a Sony tape-recorder. We don't know what to believe for sure in this extravagantly indulgent "confession." We never see Monty lift a humanitarian finger or hear him utter a philanthropic thought. Whatever sincerity there may be in this sardonic stand-up comedian, he's not who he claims to be.

He do himself in different voices. The trouble is, none of these voices seems to be quite his own. He tries naming one voice Plunkett (the glib idealist) and another Snead (the total cynic) but even these don't stick. Reared in both England and America, Monty ends up with neither nationality. His "real" name is Pendrid, behind which of course we find Wilfred; but the point is, his identity becomes a caricature no matter where he is or what he's called. He begins his radio career in a Fresno station, using two voices: a Gary Cooper parody and an old boy Britisher, "down to the monocle and spats." Naturally, Fresno likes the veddy English voice, so "My joke became my style. 'A jolly one, what?' " Now Chatworth must be careful not to be himself. Warns the station manager, "You sounded American last night, . . . We're getting complaints."

Chatworth is tormented by the American boys in his boarding school for his prissy Englishness, so he tries every evasion including a pose as Irish which he works up in the library. Stunned at first, his enemies issue a declaration: "We the undersigned Micks Wops and Ginzos don't give a shit how Irish you are. You are still a limey prick to us. (signed) The friendly sons of Mother Machree."

Sheed obviously means to admit nothing about his own life without first refracting it crazily into fiction, and I wouldn't want to suggest that any autobiography should be plucked out of it. But his confessional impulse does give the novel its peculiarly hesitant and crabby quality, surrendering glimpses and fragments only, taking long Shandian digressions, retracting a moment's illusion of authenticity with jokes and venom. The scenes at St. Boniface School outside Philadelphia come out wonderfully well here, with fewer self-conscious interruptions and more convincingly screwy details, like the story about the Jew who has "done something" to the school dog, or Chatworth's strategy of put-on saintliness, or the hopeless verbal battles over his nationality. Whenever Chatworth plays Stephen Dedalus in motley, the novel hums along delightfully. Lusting after the arch Millicent, he finds himself near his goal while punting on the Thames, but he still must contend with his Catholic scruples by drinking just enough to lose control but not enough to topple over.

[2] TRANSATLANTIC BLUES, by *Wilfred Sheed*. E. P. Dutton. $9.95.

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The novel suffers, increasingly in the final segments, from deficiency of story. Partly to blame is vagueness about Chatworth's several romances, partly the unsubstantiated television career, and partly the tacked-on conclusion. Taking Sister Veronica, the burglarized bride of Christ, to Las Vegas has its crazy appeal but it contradicts the novel's underlying skepticism. Chatworth would like to discover a real saint, someone who can't be cut down to his own size by television exposure and pseudo-sincerity. As he told us from the beginning, Chatworth seeks a world where blasphemy and guilt are real. As things stand he can only confess to ghosts in a graveyard, while pretending he's there for the brass rubbings.

Frederick Raphael is another clever entertainer with an identity problem. Since 1956 he has written fourteen novels and numerous plays for radio, television, and screen, among them "Darling," "Far from the Madding Crowd" and "Two for the Road." Speaking of glittering prizes as his latest book does, he's won a few himself, and that provides the autobiographical itch for his story.[3] It appeared first as a six-part television series in England; now it comes to America packaged as a six-part novel to appear alongside the series which aired here not long ago on public television. The cover displays a charming Adam Morris, the ambitious young Jew at Cambridge, as he appeared in the series; the back jacket displays his double, the author, squinting suspiciously at a photographer who seems to have caught him off guard, tired and unshaven. In a curious way, these pictures and the double-status of the work as television and novel, visual and verbal, tell us much about its subject.

Adam Morris wants nothing more than to be smart and successful and win the glittering prizes of life. But he also wants to preserve his feisty, joking Jewish resilience, his artistic conscience, his happy marriage, his own identity, his distance. "If there's one boat I never want to be in," he says, "it's the same boat as everyone else." He finds himself thrown together with people at Cambridge University in the 1950's who want pretty much the same things—marriage, money, fame, comfortable accommodations to an imperfect society, nothing revolutionary. Over the next twenty years experience teaches them, some more harshly than others, the deceptions of their desires. Adam must confront, for example, the exploitative ugliness of his first career idea as a media man.

In the most memorable scene of the novel Adam attempts to interview a crazy old fascist, one Stephen Taylor, whom he plans to feature in a critical discussion program for the BBC. Adam hopes it will launch a series and his own career. But the tables are alarmingly turned. Taylor counter-attacks his interviewer with a torrent of ideas, questions, mockery, rage, finally even a shotgun. Adam discovers that none of his smart ideas about Taylor are wholly true, that he didn't want the truth from this old man, only his own success. One of Adam's friends from Cambridge succeeds in this line, however, hosting a popular public affairs interview program. It's popular because the host is a glib, satiric showman, not because he has any deep concern for the common weal. Clever himself, Raphael stages the scene so that the popular television host forces his

[3] THE GLITTERING PRIZES, by *Frederick Raphael*. St. Martin's Press. $8.95.

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dinner guests at a country inn to watch his program, just so that he can see himself again being clever.

Raphael has learned something of his art from Forster: the satiric treatment of prejudice in *Passage to India,* the Cantabridgian vignettes of *The Longest Journey*. But Raphael works too much from dialogue alone, and characterization runs thin; it becomes only script and sometimes only soap opera. Adam Morris is an appealing figure, quick to anger and forgive, questioning everything with jokes, concealing a Michael Arlen romantic underneath. "He still kisses your hand?" asks a friend. "You have to start somewhere," he answers. But there's the problem again; the glib entertainer wins over the potentially richer individual.

Shelby Foote's first novel in many years shows the influence, just as one might expect, of his long sojourn as Civil War historian.[4] The new novel has something more than a pervading historical consciousness: a concept of character as unwitting witness and prime source for the history of his time. Although the plot concerns three people who pull off a kidnap-and-ransom scheme, the deeper revelations of the story appear in alternate chapters titled simply "Voices," where we listen to them (and to their victims) thinking about their whole lives. Unlike the interior monologues of, say, Faulkner, these voices sound like they're answering questions from some detached interviewer. Where were you born? What was your high school like? How did you feel when you kidnapped the boy? Do you trust your partner? What will you do with the money? Their answers to such implied questions extend the range of the story, without any loss of immediacy. In effect, Foote makes a documentary novel out of a newspaper episode.

He also keeps the rest of the world well in view: the desegregation of public schools in Little Rock, Governor Faubus issuing ultimatums, Ike and Mamie going on vacation (but oddly, no reference is made to Sheriff Bull Connors). Looking back on it, Memphis in September of 1957, just before Sputnik, how full of portent everything was! If Foote lingers too long over some of the minutiae, the names of streets and buildings and featured movies, that's forgivable. Like paging through old albums of photographs or back issues of magazines, it enforces the sense of lost times.

The kidnap victim is a black boy whose grandfather can afford the $60,000 ransom. The event is staged to look like an act of white backlash following the crisis in Little Rock. The black boy's father emerges from the experience with a new racial pride; the mother discovers how she has helped to put down her husband. Unfortunately, Foote allows these hopeful preludes to civil rights movements, for all their sociological truth, to grow sentimental. The three kidnappers, however, are wholly convincing: Podjo, the voice of experience and caution, glued to the television, determined to win the big gamble this time, if he can just play it cool; Rufus, the idea man, all energy and impatience, fresh out of jail, desperately insecure; and Reeny, Rufus's new girl friend, expert in bed but a

[4] SEPTEMBER, SEPTEMBER, by *Shelby Foote,* Random House. $8.95.

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sure loser in love, used by every man she's met except the one who died. She's had a glimpse of the high-rolling life and liked it, but "Vichyssoise turned out to be potato soup, and cold at that." Although the three have just met and hatched the plan together, it turns out they all come from the same town in Mississippi and, more depressing still, know a little about each other's unpromising lives already.

Foote details these lives with a compelling patience and solicitude. Each is made fully human, Rufus perhaps best of all. His most touching moment comes in reading aloud to his cohorts the threatening message he has just written to the victims. Rufus feels he's no dummy; having read some Kafka, he knows a thing or two about writing—who are they to criticize his work? Another supremely telling moment comes when Reeny drops off the little black boy she's been mother to for a week, and feels a strange wrenching heartache. Podjo too feels unanticipated emotions when his share of the ransom money is halved because of love. These are all carefully understated moral discoveries, and they point to an underlying judgment: these people who have no real place in the world, drifting from one gamble to another, are imprisoned in their highway freedom. For them the exotic promises of the big world, as inflated by the movies they watch and big heists they read about in the newspapers, will never be anything but cold potato soup.

Darcy O'Brien, however, doesn't find the deceptions of Dreamland all that fatal.[5] His charming first novel is the story of growing up in old Hollywood, told from the point of view of a boy whose stage-actress mother and cowboy-star father separate when romance and fortune begin to fade. Precocious and adaptable, the boy can live with whoever will provide some interest in him, but he's doomed to learn the fathomless selfishness of adults at an early age. He shuttles between parents and befriends his mother's various lovers, ever hopeful that things will work out. When she marries a Russian sculptor, the boy earnestly feels "content to benefit from her closeness and from such intangible riches as might accrue to me from living in an artistic atmosphere." Something of an innocent himself, the sculptor creates mythological figures performing sexual acts of every description. What makes this light-hearted material work, however, is the boy's matter-of-fact acceptance of contingency. Escaping for a time to live with the family of Sam Caliban, millionaire producer, the boy records with utmost respect their swanky house, their gambling manias, their Cadillacs and individual vibrator chairs.

O'Brien has, besides the gift of understatement, a good ear for parody. Here for example is part of a letter the mother writes when she fails to meet her son in Paris although he's traveling alone for the first time:

> What am I to do—the Pope was marvellous but I've had to do almost everything on my own—the story of my life—Here we are in dear Florence almost a week behind schedule but I am determined to get him to the Uffizi if it's the last thing I do—and to think I have such precious

[5] A WAY OF LIFE, LIKE ANY OTHER, by *Darcy O'Brien*. Norton. $7.95.

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> memories of these places—yes dear, some of them even with your father—I trust you arrived safely—now listen, dear . . .

The boy's father lives humbly on the crumbs of memory, hoping his wife will return some day, haunting the Athletic Club where he's still remembered, his money almost gone. Here he is, answering a rare fan letter:

> Thank you very much for your kind letters, which I have been unable to answer owing to pressing business. I have a number of deals on the fire, and you know how it is with these Hollywood people. They keep at you. I am delighted that you and your husband are involved out there in education, because there is nothing as important to our youth today. My son, Salty, is very involved in education himself . . .

Despite the most damning betrayals by both his parents and moments of acute bitterness, the boy never assumes he has a special grievance. As his title emphasizes, it was a way of life like any other, a progress from growth to self-deception and loss. He finds consolation in that anonymity. Yet he too has been a public figure. In a box of his father's newspaper clippings he finds "an announcement of my birth in Ed Sullivan's column."

Marge Piercy's assumption about our modern confusions of identity seems to be that we hide in ill-fitting categories because they protect us from pain. Her fifth novel treats a lesbian graduate student (Leslie), an undergraduate homosexual (Bernard), and a teen-age girl (Honor) who is, as Henry James might say, *disponible*.[6] Piercy's singular achievement is to make this prettily vulgar working-class girl in Detroit attractive enough so that the other two are drawn to her. They make an odd little *ménage*, protecting and yet finding security in the young girl's unselfconscious narcissism. Honor, who likes "alluring" garments and trips to Cunningham's Drug for nail polish, means to become an actress. Currently in a "French phase," she insists on such pronunciations as "Ber*nar*," "Hono*rée*" and Frenchifying *sordid* into "sor'id." It all fits perfectly in the sor'id setting of Detroit's forgotten French names like Gratiot, Livernois, and the like. Honor's older sister, Camille, becomes in the Motor City "Cam." Toward the end Honor announces dramatically that her "French phase is *finis*"!

But Piercy's deeper concern lies with the cautiously-developed intimacy of Leslie and Bernard, which sends them each back into the past, questioning the anxieties and defenses of their sexual natures. When they touch, no magical melting away of differences occurs. Their sympathies and needs are fully mutual, but with tentative sexual pleasure comes a great new power to hurt. Piercy follows out this fateful process of retreat into confusion and rage with perhaps excessive detail. The effect grows almost perverse, and frequently melodramatic. Yet the mutual disappointments of Leslie and Bernard emerge almost palpably real. In their final angry confrontation they almost touch again:

[6] THE HIGH COST OF LIVING, by *Marge Piercy*. Harper & Row. $10.

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> Like conspirators, she thought. God, it's so strange. They were both getting control of themselves, as if they were twins, as if they were of some secret family, looking at each other almost with pity, almost embracing. The disengagement from the wrestling of anger was painful too. They were so passionately caught.

Yet the novel isn't a test-tube for three characters who fail to resolve each other's problems, despite their final unhappy separateness. Its point of view belongs to Leslie: self-doubting yet fiercely self-disciplined, guilty if she doesn't work the Rape Hot Line or teach the womanly art of self-defense, but equally guilty if she doesn't slave for her Ph.D. in a male-dominated academic game where she also "must" succeed. Piercy captures her feminist anger in some of its predictable formulas ("she did not like the way men used bodies like hers to pin up on their walls and sell toothpaste and decorate glassware and magazines"), but we can't be consistently sure about the irony. Like her protagonist, Piercy it seems could go either way. Her loyalty to the Movement contests with a novelist's need for individual creative freedom, and that conflict riddles her novel with ambivalence.

Penelope Gilliatt recognizes all the same forces that make for crushing uniformities in people, but refuses to surrender any part of her conception of potential human splendor. Her third collection of stories is a series of arguments for the proposition that the past not only isn't dead yet but has a great deal to teach the present.[7] Her protagonists are mainly elderly folk—canty dames, zesty nonagenarian bishops, tottering old widows who decide to race horses or see China—and humble functionaries (caterers, accountants, charwomen, chemists). Whatever their limiting circumstances, these people are the rare wonderful ones who understand the art of making-do, with originality. They begin in stereotype and convention, and then surprise you. They defy the dreary present—characterized by retirement communities, mobile homes, phone-in radio programs, tax evasions, exercise fads, broken marriages, custody squabbles, street violence. These unlikely-seeming people remember that a splendid life has nothing to do with money. Best of all, they understand children.

In a story called "Fleeced" a millionaire who needs a front for his business has set up his son and accountant together on some Jamaica or Barbados. Wretchedly alone, the boy tries to aggravate the accountant-turned-tutor, who wants only to be back in London, making neat entries in orderly ledgers. "Keep the mind busy and the body seated" is his rule. The boy likes him after all, and a certain raffish streak emerges in the accountant. When the right moment comes for rebellion, the boy learns exactly how to carry it off from the very proper accountant. Another story, "Catering," depicts a dreary little household dominated by a mother who caters weddings. Her daughter chafes at the cramped place, the cooking smells, the servile business, the awful tastelessness of her parents' lives. Her boy friend designs contemporary furniture, so she cannot bear to show him her bedroom with its "phoney Jacobean" dressing table. "Your

[7] SPLENDID LIVES, by *Penelope Gilliatt*. Coward, McCann & Geoghegan. $7.95.

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mother saved up for that," says Mr. Pope. "Tastes change," says Mrs. Pope. "Yours don't," says the girl. But the mother turns out to have, besides a devoted husband, a devoted lover; what's more she loves everyone and is ready to accept her pregnant daughter's unwanted child. Not understanding, the girl grumbles, "You're too conventional." She's not a wise child. The story ends with mother and father staging, against considerable odds, a splendid wedding feast: "There was the feeling that ahead were thousands of lives that might be lived."

Another story, "Phone-In," makes sardonic comedy out of the pathetic lives of old folks in Retirement Villages and Sun Cities. They phone in petty complaints to cheerful, understanding old Mr. Rossiter who, with his wife as "Mr. Big Director," ladles out advice. One by-word: "Keep the brain occupied and the physique seated." The best ad-lib goes to a caller who asks, "What's Horseshoes?":

> "Looking for horseshoes [says Rossiter]. Horseshoes are lucky, and the search can take you to all sorts of places. And then you deduce the description and life-story of the horse. The life-story *so far*, that is. It's not necessarily over. If contemporary, a horse's shoes are being changed all the time, of course. Then suppose . . .

All this is wacky improvisation, of course, and fraudulent in a sense. The caller seeks only a hobby to relieve boredom; mentally he's quite dead already. But Rossiter, who hasn't the foggiest notion about *playing* horseshoes, is delightfully alive. As he says, "It's a great question, keeping the brain interested." What Gilliatt's stories say, finally, is that humaneness—love, understanding, generosity—depends on childlike recoveries of the sense of possibility, adventure, risk. Paradoxically, old people seem to do it best.

For Beryl Bainbridge, however, the past is quite convincingly dead.[8] Her muddle-headed characters haven't a trace of splendor; we laugh *at* them, while they limp through a grotesque parody of, say, *Private Lives*. Edward, who is having an affair with Binny, worries mainly about getting home to Helen by eleven; Binny, who wants to entertain Edward's proper friends at dinner, forgets she put the pudding behind the refrigerator; her boozy pal, Alma, turns up awkwardly twice and throws up once; dinner-guest Simpson slips out to call his mistress, and a man answers; meanwhile his wife, Muriel, worries about where could they possibly have put her fur wrap. In the course of the evening Edward finds he quite dislikes Binny and quite likes Muriel; Simpson, for reasons of symmetry, finds he quite likes Binny, until drunken Alma lurches in to postpone these games. They all might be fugitives from one of those delightful British comedy films of the fifties, with Joyce Grenfell, Ian Carmichael, Lionel Jeffries, Terry-Thomas, and that ilk.

But someone has changed the scenery, and although most of them haven't really noticed yet, the world has turned rather ugly. Eggshells collect beneath the hedge. The Hoover vacuum gets flung into the yard.

[8] INJURY TIME, by *Beryl Bainbridge*. Braziller. $7.95.

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The ketchup bottle appears to have a rim of dried blood. Full of mess and menace, yet Bainbridge denies this fallen world any real horror by keeping it at a comic distance: "The waitress was affronted at the bold way they expected service." Or when Binny ventures across the street she smiles nicely, "after she had leapt to safety, at a youth on a bicycle who failed to run her down on the zebra crossing." He might have been one of her own monstrous children, who loll about the house until the pubs open and call her names like "Fascist pig." Binny wonders vaguely where she went wrong; perhaps she should have hit the children more. All this is good satiric fun. The author's ulterior motive in it seems to be the transformation of nasty parlor farce into real nightmare. What these characters need is a dose of reality, a good conk on the head. Even Binny who worries more about street menace than the others finds herself gazing out the window looking "for clues and suchlike" because as she explains, "I keep thinking I'm watching television. . . . There doesn't seem to be much difference."

Accordingly, the impending violence falls. Fleeing bank robbers descend on Binny's flat, brandishing weapons, dousing lights, barricading against police attack. The evening's entertainment seems definitely to have ended. But not for the neighbors across the street, who set up deckchairs the better to follow the action. In fact, no great transformation of the novel occurs; the farce continues relentlessly even though it's less and less funny. At gunpoint they play a game of ping pong (without ball) as a charade of their "happiness." Edward muffs a chance to get one of the guns because he's afraid of knocking dishes into the sink. Appropriately, he is the one to announce with perfect inaccuracy, "Everything's so real now. It's all so real." It should be, of course, with their lives at stake, but it isn't. Violence and terror, when experienced first-hand, turn out to be just as banal as eggshells under the hedge, just as phoney as television. Nothing is real because it's a plagiarized scenario, and all their scripts are second hand. Binny is dragged upstairs to be raped by Ginger, who must have understudied Pinkie in *Brighton Rock*. Binny "supposed" she was being raped, but it was "unreal, of no account." Afterwards they chat aimlessly, at cross purposes. Incredible of course, but that's the point. The criminals too are only bumbling actors who have picked up their roles from books and movies too; they're not *really* evil. Playing it for such farce to the very end, Bainbridge spoils her best judgments. If there's no truly menacing reality there, then why condemn characters who fail to respond to it? What the novel needs is a conviction about the reality of evil. Without that, this charmingly cruel farce lacks the final necessary bite.

The interpretation of Graham Greene's latest novel also involves a question of derivative scenario, but in this case an autoplagiarism.[9] In a sense, the moral of Maurice Castle's story lies as much outside it as within. For most readers, I suspect, the cumulative effect of several well-remembered novels (of the previous nineteen), plus some oft-quoted passages from *The Lost Childhood,* will be enough to set things in motion as the new work unfolds. Its title alone gives us the *sine qua non* of Greeneland, the human factor that disrupts the schemes of so many hardened criminals of

[9] THE HUMAN FACTOR, by *Graham Greene*. Simon & Schuster. $9.95.

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our species and redeems them, the factor that makes possible mercy, hope, and love even in the darkest places. Greene's characters generally discover this precious human factor of love by trying to avoid it. Then it pursues them like the hound of heaven. The epigraph from Conrad also gets to the heart of the matter: "I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered into his soul." That corruption we have learned to read paradoxically as our salvation. In *The Honorary Consul*, for example, caring for another person was "the only dangerous thing."

Greene's latest protagonist, Maurice Castle, has worked in the British Secret Service for thirty years and conducted himself with scrupulous regularity, except for one event. Seven years before the novel begins he fell in love with a black woman in South Africa and escaped with her at the cost of his subsequent political freedom. Now he must play the dangerous game of double agent, coerced to betray his country because he loves his wife and son. Such summary exposes the story's melodrama, but Greene tells it with that scrupulous austerity and those deadly ironic touches—like Castle's having to kill the family dog—which make it all seem so authentic and irresistibly human.

Yet does the story really fit the familiar scenario? For me the novel carries a much more powerful sub-text, which argues that loneliness is preferable to love, and isolation superior to attachment. For all his protestations to the contrary, Castle takes an inordinate satisfaction in the blackness of his wife and son. Blackness keeps them satisfyingly foreign to him, so that even in conventional Berkhamsted he can feel isolated. Meanwhile his wife has nightmares about her color anxieties, and the son begins to fantasize scenes of black vengeance. Even better, for Castle, is the fact that the boy's real father was black: "I love Sam because he's yours," he explains to his wife. "Because he's not mine. Because I don't have to see anything of myself there when I look at him." Considered one way, this could be admirable freedom from parental egotism; but any other way it's a guilty assertion of detached responsibility. Subsequent actions speak louder than words. Castle can't bear to tell the boy spy stories at bedtime, he cannot play hide-and-seek spontaneously with him on a picnic, he's too weary and skeptical for such love. His young partner Davis, however, makes a perfect father; succeeds exactly where Castle fails with Sam, and the boy naturally loves him. Davis is able to love, agonizingly, an uncaring bitch. Davis is the man within: the reckless lover where Castle is not, the natural father where Castle is not. While Davis marks his edition of Browning with the code letter of his love, Castle codes his Trollope and Tolstoy with political information for the enemy. If Davis is killed ostensibly by the stupidity of the agents who define the true sordidness of this profession, he is killed really by Castle, for Castle's crimes. For Davis represents all that Castle has wanted dead in himself.

When Castle must flee his home, he can invent no other excuse for sending wife and child to his abysmal mother than that of a bitter quarrel, a threatened divorce. Apparently, of course, the scenario calls for bitter ironies and moral paradoxes: to protect what he loves, he must flee; the cost of everything he values shall be its total loss. But it makes just as good sense to read this scenario as direct acting out of what he really wants. For

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another example, the dog Castle is "forced" to kill. Why is there no other solution? Because Castle never liked the dog in the first place—a drooling, helplessly affectionate creature, failed as a watchdog, now only an embarrassing pet. Castle gets no secret pleasure from the dog's death, certainly; but he must grovel by this means in the knowledge of his full incompetence to love this creature. It's the human factor incarnate, and he wants it dead.

Similarly Castle must shake off the human factor again just before he escapes the country. He's an old friend this time, met by chance in a hotel lobby. Castle feigns enthusiasm but in his heart he dislikes and mistrusts the "friend." In appropriate disguise as a blind man, convoyed by a helpful lady, Castle denies the dubious friend twice more. Says the lady, "You sure must be very like his friend." Castle answers, "Everybody in the world, so they say, has a double." Greene's hero, then, is a double agent in the deepest spiritual sense, estranged from himself, secretly hating that which he's supposed to love. To escape such guilt he would cross any border. He envies Davis in death: "Davis would no longer be under surveillance. He had escaped." So too would Castle escape the torments of self-scrutiny, when at the end the telephone line to his wife goes dead. Although this counter-theme or sub-text undercuts Greene's—or is it just Castle's?—redemptive theme, it ultimately strengthens the novel, preventing any easy celebration of Castle as a picaresque saint. At the heart of the novel there are no such consoling messages, only darkness, the loneliness of self-exile, and death.

Another symptom of the disappearing self has been, in life no less than in fiction, a violent counter-assertion which engenders a macho upstart. The type has been popular in recent years—Kesey's McMurphy, Donleavy's ginger man, Mailer's Rojack, to name a few—because he rages at the system. He appeals in much the same way as the man a few years ago who lost money in a vending machine, pulled out a pistol and shot it. That may not be a solution, but think of the satisfaction! Tom McHale's latest novel offers some interesting twists on this formula.[10] Rejected by a bitch goddess of liberal affluence from Boston, our corn-fed mid-western macho conservative goes after her with a vengeance. Named Dwight David after a beloved President from Abilene, he reveres nobody so much as his deposed hero, Richard Nixon. We first see Dwight David entrenched in his tacky-new building project in Vermont, trying to stay alive as the natives of this realm of town-meeting democracy (fellow Republicans, of course) destroy him, one eyesore building after another. McHale plays the satire in both directions, so that we find ourselves liking this infuriating slob in spite of ourselves. He also takes his lumps from a pair of Indians, one a sloven and the other a graduate of Harvard Law School.

McHale manages to keep all these caricatures moving amusingly fast, partly by his clever jumps in narrative sequence, partly by the sheer rush of their explosive talk. Dwight David incurs so much inordinate wrath, McHale would like us to think, because he represents what we've all

[10] THE LADY FROM BOSTON, by *Tom McHale*. Doubleday. $8.95.

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repressed in ourselves—our natural priapic energies, our capacity for stubborn loyalties. Dwight David is meant to be a noble throwback to American pioneers and rebels. Besides the noble Indian, his only counterpart is crazy great-aunt Zebidiah, who embodies perfectly his desired status: contempt for all law and compromise, free to celebrate in feast and dance her untramelled self, responsible to nobody. Dwight David can't survive in the mean modern world, but he does have two triumphs: one is tricking the bitch-goddess of liberal Boston to marry him (the trick is something like hog-calling), and the other is getting the goods on her father, a phoney-liberal millionaire politician who deceives everybody. Inevitably, too many cartoons grow tiresome, no matter how edged with political satire. But the deeper deficiency is the novel's shallow romantic stance: the notion that this macho upstart self offers some viable politics of confrontation.

Something suspiciously like it appears also in Mark Helprin's first novel, a work that seems at first to issue from an entirely different mold.[11] Marshall Pearl's literary ancestry goes back through John Barth's protean heroes and Ralph Ellison's invisible man toward Tom Jones and the mock-epic novel. Pearl seems to be, for much of the story, yet another man without qualities, another hero with a thousand faces drawn from the formulas of Lord Raglan and Joseph Campbell. (Like McHale, Helprin writes with enormous skill and energy in an exhausted literary vein.) Pearl's Jewish mother, a near victim of extermination during the War, dies in giving him birth. At this very moment the ship carrying her, loaded with Jewish exiles of all nations, makes a glorious beach landing in Palestine, taking on the U. S. Navy to do it. Helprin tells this story effectively, with the captain (who much later will become the hero's father-in-law) turning his decrepit ship and miscellany of exiles into a deadly attacking force. Then begins a long series of apprenticeships and tests for the hero. Too much of this is predictable story-book material, very fuzzily outlined, most of it well beyond credibility. What it all leads to is the ultimate battle in Israel and the refining fire of the October War. Marshall Pearl then becomes that priceless pearl, the glorious martial spirit of the Jews incarnate. What this pseudo-romance celebrates, invidiously I think, is mindless vengeance. The hero seeks his paternity in war, and there sure enough he finds it, after miraculous recovery from wounds that would have felled mortals. But this one is a justified fanatic. Everywhere the moral is laid on: suffering refines the spirit (and makes it a killer). What glorifies Marshall Pearl, beyond his unexamined cause, looks suspiciously like skilled savagery to me, without real suffering. Helprin's hero turns out to be another upstart macho, in a far more endearing package this time, but just as humanly empty. Deliver us from these monstrosities. The ordinary self, saturated by the fictions of the media though he may be, tells us so much more about the way we live now.

[11] REFINER'S FIRE: THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF MARSHALL PEARL, FOUNDLING, by *Mark Helprin*. Knopf. $10.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Issues and Answers; or, If You've Tried It Don't Knock It

WRITING TO A FRIEND WHO HAS A NEW BOOK OUT, Edmund Wilson remarks that "I find it rather hard—which happens rarely with me—to judge it as a book"; but he's being modest, the case isn't rare, it's unique: among these letters[1] and his two dozen volumes, it may well be the only evidence that he is ever stumped, no other critic except Mencken has ever been so ready to produce a brisk and categorical judgment for anything at all that comes along. Sometimes, especially when what comes along is muddle-headedness or malice, he can be as exhilarating as the best of Mencken and more focused:

> It is appalling that Nabokov's little story, so gentle and everyday, should take on the aspect for the *New Yorker* editors of an overdone psychiatric study. (How *can* you people say it is overwritten?) It could only appear so in contrast with the pointless and inane little anecdotes that are turned out by the *New Yorker*'s processing mill and that the reader forgets two minutes after he has read them. . . .

Wilson's correspondent here (in 1947) is the fiction editor of *The New Yorker;* and which of us during the past fifty years hasn't written this letter a thousand times in his dreams? Or here (in 1940) is Wilson reasoning with *Partisan Review* after both he and his wife have had commissioned articles turned down:

> You people are getting as bad as *The New Republic*. Dwight Macdonald was after me for that Lenin piece for months, constantly writing me and calling me up. I fixed it up for you when I was in New York at a time when you knew my book was coming out and what the piece would be like. At the same time you asked Mary [McCarthy] to do a piece on *Pinocchio* and *The Grapes of Wrath,* which she went to some trouble to see in order to be able to do the article on time. The next time you saw her, you told her that the piece was all off for what seems to me the fantastic reason that you wouldn't be able to make space for it—as if Sidney Hook's interminable articles wouldn't always be the better for cutting. Now you send back my Lenin with the suggestion that I do you a little something on the younger novelists. You are developing all the symptoms of the occupational disease of editors—among them, thinking up idiotic ideas for articles that you want the writers to write instead of printing what they want to write. . . .

[1] LETTERS ON LITERATURE AND POLITICS, by *Edmund Wilson*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $20.

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Or bulldog Wilson sinking his teeth into the flabby haunch of the Modern Language Association—Wilson had proposed a series of complete editions of American authors in a convenient and inexpensive format like that of the French Pléiade editions, and the proposal had been approved for a Federal subsidy; but the MLA had pulled strings to have the subsidy canceled in favor of a Federally-subsidized monopoly for its own grotesquely over-edited, over-priced, over-sized, overweight editions (Wilson observes that *The Marble Faun,* "the masterpiece of MLA bad bookmaking," has 748 pages and weighs nine pounds in an elephantine format, whereas the Pléiade complete Montaigne has 1,791 pages in beautifully readable type and weighs two pounds in a shape and size feasible for reading), all these MLA projects to proceed at a pace which promises that the last volume of each will be extruded from the computer in time for the first manned flight to Alpha Centauri:

> a team of thirty-five scholars . . . are working on the Mark Twain papers. . . . It seems that eighteen of these Mark Twain workers are reading *Tom Sawyer* word by word, backward, in order to ascertain, without being diverted from this drudgery by attention to the story or the style, how many times "Aunt Polly" is printed as "aunt Polly," and how many times "ssst!" is printed as "sssst!" . . .

Wilson's essay "The Fruits of the MLA" (reprinted in *The Devils and Canon Barham*), together with his letters on the issue, is the scholarly introduction to the cretins who run the MLA and the profession. Stirred to their muddy depths, they responded by publishing a collective rebuttal that began with a diatribe against "amateurs" and continued backward word by word with the usual parade of low-comedy lecture-note pig-Latin: "After all, Eliot revolted against the Romantics, of whom Blake was one." After all, even more revolting than Blake and Eliot are the literary professors, of whom neither was one.[2]

[2] Wilson accurately describes *PMLA* as a "periodical . . . which contains for the most part unreadable articles on literary problems and discoveries of very minute or no interest." If he had turned into a faithful reader, he would soon have noticed its limpetlike adhesion to any already moribund intellectual fad, e.g. structuralism—as in this Table-of-Contents "abstract" of an article in the March 1978 issue:

> A letter to the hero in *Daniel Deronda* offers an interpretation of George Eliot's novel, an account of its rhetorical principles: the Deronda plot discloses not "the effects of causes" but the "present causes of past effects." This metaleptic plot structure contradicts the linking of origin, cause, and identity affirmed in the story of Deronda's Jewish birth. The story must shift between constative and performative conceptions of language and must finally invoke the notion of an actual, nonlinguistic fact or act. The relevant referent is Deronda's circumcision, which the novel must occlude; otherwise the story of discovering identity could not unfold. The scandal of this referent is its status as an exemplary signifier, alluding to the divine pact with Abraham, a story of the institution of signification. Circumcision is an emblem of the novel's allusive or citational mode: the narrative makes its starting point, not a subject, but a rhetorical operation.

Occluded circumcisions were all the rage just a few years back.

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Wilson doesn't play favorites, he's just as ready to take on even his friends if they too make a point of ignoring common sense and common decency—"What in God's name has happened to you?" he writes to Malcolm Cowley, who is still following the Stalin line in 1938: "In fact, you try to mislead the reader by one of those 'bedfellow' tricks in which the *Daily Worker* indulges. . . . I don't suppose you're a member of the C.P.; and I can't imagine any other inducement short of bribery or blackmail . . . to justify and imitate their practices at this time." But the last phrase—"at this time"—is important, because as late as 1935, when the Stalinist rewriting of history had been under way for a decade and the early purges had already occurred, Wilson didn't hesitate to defend the Stalin line with arguments that Cowley or *The Daily Worker* would have cheered to the rafters:

> I don't see any reason to disbelieve that they had a counterrevolutionary conspiracy backed by Germany on their hands, as they say they had. . . . It is surely a mistake, as [Robert Morss] Lovett said the other day, to assume that the victims were innocent because there were so many of them. . . .

Others—faint-hearted comrades and fair-weather friends—could hang on only by managing to doubt that death had undone so many, but straight-shooter Wilson didn't doubt and didn't mind. Anyhow numbers or innocence is overrated, in a much smaller country centuries ago Swift had already recommended the butchering of as many as a hundred thousand babies a year to serve the purposes of the cannibal elite, you can't make a Soviet omelette without breaking a million eggs, and, so Wilson opines in 1935, "Stalin is a convinced Marxist and old Bolshevik . . . working for socialism in Russia." (In 1938 he wrote to Muriel Draper: "I can't imagine that you believe that the Stalin administration has been trying to achieve the aims of Lenin.") Wilson at any moment ("at this time") knows what he knows, and insists on sharing it: in any however casual letter no issue is too difficult for his off-the-cuff unconditional judgment, e.g. (in 1952) judicial euthanasia—"the great reform needed is a law to authorize the chloroforming of imbeciles and hopeless psychiatric cases. Of course, mistakes would be made, and the people would have to be very carefully checked, but we already put a lot of other matters into the hands of Boards of Health, etc." Utopian omelettes from innocent cracked eggs.

With Wilson, though, it isn't malice or muddle-headedness or political opportunism or inhumanity, it's a compulsion to settle the issue (explain the book, solve the problem) once and for all, to classify it and dispose of it and make room for the next in line; but issues don't stay put, and few are simple. Wilson is a plugger, ambitious and indefatigable, he keeps up, he enjoys the work of close reading (most of all, the work required by this century's hard texts: "I have described . . . what actually takes place there [an episode of *Ulysses*] as I have worked it out"; but in 1965 he confides to a friend, "About *Ulysses*: . . . parts of it . . . are just incredibly dull"), he enjoys the mechanics of language and the variety of languages (he had learned Russian and Hebrew late, he was learning Hungarian in his old

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age); but words, his own or others', are mainly meaning (when he learned Russian—and there is testimony, including his own, that he was no expert—he excitedly discovered untranslatable marvels in the very texture of Pushkin, Turgenev, *Doctor Zhivago* which somehow he too couldn't translate or even begin to give an impression of beyond mere meaning) because meaning, once he fits it in or works it out, leaves him with little feeling for the words in their particular vibrations—

> I have sometimes become so bored with the language in which I wrote articles—the monotony of the vocabulary and the recurrence of routine formulas—that I would find it a great relief to get away from this kind of writing and give myself a freer hand in a play or a piece of fiction in which I could make people talk as contemporary Americans did . . .

(but his plays and fiction are very much duller and less idiomatic than his criticism); the trouble is that ideas are mostly formulas, books are not life, people don't do what they're supposed to, history doesn't come out right ("Reading the newspapers, and even the world's literature, I find that I more and more feel a boredom with and even scorn for the human race"), common sense and good intentions are indispensable but limited, Freud and Marx and Symbolism don't take up the slack, dogmatic platitudes stream in from all directions and try to pass for discoveries and answers: "One cannot tell whether Mr. Carr is aware of the obvious connection between Bakunin's incurable impotence and his orgiastic passion for destruction"; Edna Millay's "Renascence" is "a great affirmation of the stature of the human spirit"; "*The Fall of the House of Usher* is not merely an ordinary ghost story: the house—see the opening paragraph—is an image for a human personality, and its fate—see the fissure that runs through the wall—is the fate of a disrupted mind"; *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is "something more than the story of a love affair: it is a parable of post-war England" (a book with ideas and meanings and the courage to say shit and therefore Wilson admired it; but otherwise, having read only *Lady Chatterley,* Wilson dismissed on hearsay evidence everything else by Lawrence and so missed something else he had written: "Books are not life").

It's less a passionate conviction than a bookish and—perish the thought—professorial certainty: the assignment for Monday is—, the meaning of this passage is—. Wilson is a kind of classroom showman whose daily disclosures come to look rather less sensational when they appear in print and outside the blackboard birdcage: "I have just done a very Freudian study of Ben Jonson, which I have a feeling . . . [*The New Yorker* is] not going to print," he writes anxiously to a friend; but it was duly printed, and turned out to to be an account of the meaning of Jonson's work examined in the light of Wilson's discovery that Jonson was "an obvious example of a psychological type which has been described by Freud and designated by a technical name, *anal erotic* . . . [of which] the three main characteristics are . . . paraphrased from Freud as follows: '(a) orderliness . . . ; (b) parsimony . . . ; (c) obstinacy . . .' "; repressed, retentive, sluggish, and so forth, though nothing that can't be taken care of by a strong dose of salts: "But his habit of saving and holding back—did

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his Scotch ancestry figure here, too?—had an unfortunate effect on his work" (The Scotch Marine went over the top/Because he heard a nickel drop). Probably Wilson's most widely read essay is "The Ambiguity of Henry James" (reprinted in anthologies of lit-crit as an example of how to do it), which rather than being about ambiguity—Wilson apparently doesn't understand the word—is another Freudian exposure of a writer's true meaning, taking off this time from Wilson's excited discovery (with the help of an earlier essay by somebody else) that *The Turn of the Screw* is a *trompe-l'oeil* and *tour de force* which *seems* to mean one thing but *in fact* means another (though years later, when James's notebooks were published and said the opposite, Wilson somewhat recanted and came to believe that there was more in what it meant and less in what it seemed to mean).

Gertrude Stein's derisive label for Pound—"village explainer"—sticks better to Mencken or Wilson, both of whom were Chautauqua rationalists who tended to clarify issues into unintelligibility; only, unlike Mencken, Wilson secretly believed he could change the world. For example, the professor with a platform at *The New Yorker* and a secure reputation as the leading American critic really believed, when he "published a little book on the subject of the Dead Sea scrolls" (for which his beginner's Hebrew was pressed into service), that it would make the Church totter:

> It seemed to me that the discovery in these pre-Christian documents of a doctrine, a ritual and a discipline very similar to those of Christianity, as well as of a "Teacher of Righteousness" who seemed in some ways to anticipate Jesus . . . might present an embarrassing problem to any theology based on the dogma that Jesus was the Son of God, a unique and supernatural figure . . . yet the scrolls have proved not to be [so] disturbing . . . as I had thought they were likely to be.

But then the world didn't measure up to his plans and expectations from as early as 1917, when he was twenty-two in an army camp waiting to be shipped overseas—

> You have no idea, seriously, how isolated and inward you become, surrounded by and dealing with people with whom you cannot talk the real language, whose habits and manners you detest, and with whom the only qualities which you have in common are the qualities which you would most willingly destroy forever. And yet *nihil humani mihi alienum est*. This is not the absence of charity on my part; it is only the reaction of intelligence.

—till a half-century later in his seventies when he charitably itemized the world's more recent defects:

> The policies of the lying governments; the inevitable standardization of what we assume to be "exotic" and "backward" peoples; the stupidity of applied ideologies; the competition for "success" and "status"—and with all this, the inferiority, mental as well as physical, of the specimens of the human race that I see all around me in America.

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We had better make one thing perfectly clear. Wilson can be as cutting as he pleases about his mental edge over us youth of 1966: we've disappointed him; we're sorry; but when he says that he and his contemporaries at Princeton and at camp among the alien humanoids and in the Manhattan of the 'twenties—that in short these dumpy people have a *physical* edge over us, he is going too far. A typical method of Wilson's when the grand manner seems called for is to describe in the voice of a tape-recorded museum tour the official portrait of somebody or other: "Let us take a last look at him [Michelet, in *To the Finland Station*] . . . with his mask of determined will, which seems always to have been straining, never relaxed—the long plebeian jaw, the self-assertive chin, the set mouth, the fine trenchant nose . . . " and so on. Wilson himself was five-feet-six, weighed two hundred pounds much of his life, and in the photo on the back of the jacket of the *Letters* is the spit and image of Sydney Greenstreet in *The Maltese Falcon*.

We grew up on Wilson's essays and collections, we waited for his next piece in *The New Republic* and later in *The New Yorker,* he was our polymath and our incorruptible, he tackled everything and we trusted him, he knew who the important writers were, he dosed us with Marx and Freud and *explication de texte* in just the right proportions and—presto! all the big books made sense; he had the right tone (revolutionary and down-to-earth, sardonic and millennial, reasonable and concerned), he was familiar and authoritative, he was easy good reading on the bus or in the college cafeteria. Pound had long since gone round the bend; Eliot was slippery, and his politics dismayed us; Leavis seemed—well, a mite touchy; Trilling sounded like Eliot after shock treatments; we didn't know Lawrence had written anything but novels: so we kept returning to Wilson with the feeling that, as long as those unequivocal bulletins kept coming out, we didn't have to worry about the life of the mind. Nonetheless, back in those halcyon days we couldn't help suspecting he didn't have the makings of a theoretical critic: whenever he took a deep breath he floated off into a sort of eternally revolving unintense inane—"what she wants other people to know she imparts to them by creating an object, the self-developing organism of a work of prose" (cf. an undergraduate's equally dizzying but much more direct approach to the zero degree of writing, as reported by Irving Howe: "The idea of character is fictitious"). Moreover, he always had too much petulance to be the flinty Jeremiah he latterly aspired to be: when in *A Piece of My Mind* or *The Cold War and the Income Tax* he denounced the world and the human race, he sounded like an eminent contemporary of his, another survivor of the apocalyptic 'twenties and 'thirties who, asked recently why Marx's hopes and dreams for us hadn't come true, replied in thunder: "Because what he couldn't figure on was that the working class would turn out to be a bunch of bums!"

"When I call myself a journalist," said Wilson, "I mean that I have made my living mainly by writing in periodicals." He is of course trying to pull the rug out from under those who might argue he's a journalist in a different and less neutral meaning of the word—for instance if they said that his style is journalistic because its intention is to be clearer and more coherent and more general than the topic (any topic) allows, and because

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to reread him (or to read him carefully) is to be "bored," as he himself complains, "[by] the monotony of the vocabulary and the recurrence of routine formulas." His three "serious" books (not his collections or his fiction) are all efforts to make a grand design and lengthy synopsis or quotation and judgment, judgment, judgment do the work of style; but monotony and routine formulas are never merely a matter of style, and in *Axel's Castle* and *To the Finland Station* the endlessly assertive judgments and the monotony of the lists of the virtues and the vices of each of the characters—first enthusiastically pro, then deprecatingly con, then maybe five pages of pro again and back to con and then, thank God! a synthesis—get to be a trifle more exasperating than the not quite complex inexhaustible style:

> [Joyce's] work is prodigiously rich and alive. His force instead of following a line, expands itself in every dimension (including that of Time) about a single point. The world of "Ulysses" is animated by a complex inexhaustible life. . . .
>
> Joyce has as little respect as Proust for the capacities of the reader's attention; and one feels, in Joyce's case as in Proust's, that the *longueurs* which break our backs . . . are partly . . . [intended] to compensate by piling things up for an inability to make them move. . . .
>
> Yet even these episodes contribute something valuable. . . . [*Axel's Castle*]

To the Finland Station introduces us to a well-known German philosopher and one of the seminal influences on Marx, a fellow named Hegel, "who had been swept up in his early years, before he had stiffened into a Prussian professor, by the surge of the French Revolution"; and just as depressing as the racy intercourse between these images are Wilson's usual (Hegelian?) last-ditch struggles to synthesize the pros and cons:

> if we are repelled by these traits [arrogance, mistrust, jealousy, vindictiveness, gratuitous malignity] in Marx, we must remember that a normally polite and friendly person could hardly have accomplished the task which it was the destiny of Marx to carry through . . .

—but Marx "was closer than he could ever have imagined to that imperialistic Germany he detested. After all, the German Nazis too—also, the agents of an historical mission—believe [the book was published in 1940] that humanity will be happy and united when it is all Aryan and all submissive to Hitler." Thus, presumably, we oughtn't to be repelled by Hitler's unpleasant traits because without them he could hardly have accomplished the task which it was his destiny to carry through.

Wilson's most satisfactory book is *Patriotic Gore*—perhaps because for once he is dealing with impressive people who aren't a part of the intellectual's portable pantheon: in fact he has no alternative to inventing, for the purposes of his book, Harriet Beecher Stowe and her husband, General Sherman, Alexander Stephens, even Lincoln out of their own voluminous and relatively unrifled documentation of themselves, which he

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quotes not only voluminously but effectively and surrounds with judgments that are fresh and sympathetic enough to do it justice. It's a pity, then, that the Introduction (written years after many of the chapters) is mostly irrelevant to the book and an example of the author in his unloveliest ill temper, and that the book itself goes on far too long, tries to cover far too much ground, and eventually bogs down and sinks without a trace among the minutiae of the innumerable minor and uninteresting post-Civil-War writers that Wilson has persuaded himself he needs to bring in for the sake of his grand design.

Or that he brings in simply because he can't resist doing a little lecture on almost anybody who writes books. What is evident from his letters as well as from the late and the posthumous memoirs is that he lived as literary a life as possible. He accepts it as a responsibility and a power: he is very generous with long letters full of careful and practical suggestions not only to writers who are friends of his—Dos Passos, John Peale Bishop, Fitzgerald—but to strangers who ask for encouragement and advice; he is an honorable and tactful editor, he enjoys discovering and helping new writers, he reads up on things, he likes to keep in touch. True, he isn't infallible, especially about the work of friends: he dotes on Alfred Kazin's *Contemporaries,* the standard mix of NYTBR puffs and snarls that stay news as long as the Sunday papers they come wrapped with; and as late as 1945 he can still say that Paul Rosenfeld is "the best writer on music we have—the only one who is really a writer," but, after a sampling of twenty years of Rosenfeld's prose in several of his books and a few volumes of *Modern Music,* it's hard to avoid the conclusion that Rosenfeld is the worst writer in the history of civilization, turning out on every page abstract stuff like this: "Never a poet endowed, say, in Strawinsky's degree with the instinctive capacity for the harmonization of expression and actuality, Hindemith seasonably showed himself responsive to the pace and rhythm of contemporary life"; and, describing a piece of music, concrete stuff like this: "peasants and 'little kids' [he means *children*!] sporting in the abandon and joy of wholeness. (Toughness and fecundity of earth, that lets the sharp teeth of her children bite into the real!)."

Wilson seems to have been at least acquainted if not on familiar terms with every American writer from Rosenfeld to Wilfrid Sheed and Erich Segal. Indeed gossiping about Eliot's private miseries, John Peale Bishop's Gorgon of a wife, Fitzgerald and Zelda misbehaving, Edna Millay taking men on like a Greenwich Village Messalina, Wilson is a more useful writer than in his public essays about the same writers: "Nabokov has suddenly written me a letter telling me that he values my friendship and that all has been forgiven. He has been told that I have been ill, and it always makes him cheerful to think that his friends are in bad shape. He was mourning for Roman Grynberg at least ten years before he died." The great love of Wilson's life was Edna Millay, yet his memorial essay about her is glum and sentimental: one of the events quickly passed over is an evening "John Bishop and I . . . spent . . . with her together . . . on our old high and positive basis" just before her first visit to Europe; and the essay ends with an Ivory-Flakes image of Millay "running around the corner of Macdougal Street, flushed and laughing,

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'like a nymph,' with her hair swinging. Floyd Dell, also laughing, pursued her." But in his journal (published in the posthumous memoir *The Twenties*) Wilson is more specific about that farewell evening: "After dinner, sitting on her day bed, John and I held Edna in our arms—according to an arrangement insisted upon by herself—I her lower half and John her upper—with a polite exchange of pleasantries as to which had the better share"; and though he still can't quite get down to details, this much of the truth is more useful than the high and positive basis he is sitting on in the public essay.

Thirty years later, in a chapter of *A Piece of My Mind* which he calls "Sex" (and for which a more accurate title would have been "Eugenics for Tiny Tots" or "The Fox and the Grapes" or "The Dog in the Manger"), he has come to understand that sex has no interest or "purpose" whatever except the improvement of the breed, that whether they know it or not lovers in modern literature suffer from "the basic biological bafflement of the failure to produce children," that Lawrence's "glorification of intercourse for its own sake" (though except for Connie and Mellors he hasn't read Lawrence) and Millay's "feminine promiscuity" are silly. Forty years later, in *Upstate,* "When I read even a love story that might once have moved me—instead of thinking that, except on the very lowest level, a principle of selection is at work: they are trying to improve the human breed—I think, Oh, it's just a man trying to get his penis into some woman"; and one day, in a theater on West 42nd Street, he sits through three hard-core pornographic films:

> I do not think that such films should be allowed. College students should not be encouraged to go in for drug-taking orgies, and the film about the rapist could be taken as demonstrating how easy it is to commit a rape: just follow the woman up a dark alley and give her a clout with a club.

—and furthermore he wants us to know that he has come to understand that the 'twenties, the decade of his young manhood, were in fact "a squalid period" of drunkenness and debauchery. So, as the sun sinks slowly in the west, we bid farewell to issues and answers and the rational roving reporter, who by now ("at this time") has doubtless quite forgotten all the undisclosed details and sensations of that fond farewell to his better half, so long ago, when (at *that* time) in concert with his best friend he was so delightfully attached not for eugenic purposes to "some woman" but for fun and games to the particular and irreplaceable love of his life.

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JONATHAN ARAC

Critical Abstracts

NO REIGNING CRITICAL ORTHODOXY EMERGES from the recent books on poetry I have been sent, unless it be their rejection of formalism and their consequent wish to relate poems to something grander and more inclusive than mere poetry: the real, the self, language, feeling. Such master terms impose upon the critic who chooses one a fundamentally different orientation from that of a critic who has chosen another, and none of these critics takes much account of competing perspectives. Their books all hew strongly to a thesis. This review aims to open up their positions through engagements with other voices, to stage a conversation that interrupts these monologues. I wish also to suggest the literal and the literary as the common ground that poets, their readers, and their critics all most specifically, and thus usefully, share. The institution of literature, the organized practices of reading and writing, encompass a human community and history larger than that of an isolated poem but more concretely defined than the spaciousness of grand abstractions.

John Holloway's book ambitiously takes on "poetry, insight and the self" in England from 1620 to 1920.[1] *The Proud Knowledge* defines "new ways of constructing a poem" that follow from the "profound modification" of "the European consciousness . . . since the time of the supreme traditionalist Shakespeare." In the seventeenth century the "aspiring mind" broke free, and, "deprived of guidance from society or tradition," each person had to "make his own nature" from hard-won knowledge of the world. In this version of Eliot's "dissociation of sensibility," modern poetry newly discovers truth, while the "rhetorical structures" of traditional poetry had only organized what was "already established." The "first of our great moderns" is Milton; *Paradise Lost* is a "striving to know"; both its verbal style and its subject perform "the activity of enquiry itself," until the moment when Adam reaches his "fill of knowledge" and can pursue his "solitary way" with Eve from Eden. Only with the romantics did such modernity fully establish itself, and even in the nineteenth century, his main concern, Holloway examines not just the glorious quest for knowledge but also the dark side of such questing, as well as instances in which the poet focuses on figures whose given rootedness opposes his own antithetical restlessness.

What does this scheme suggest about our involvement with poetry? For Holloway, we turn to poetry to learn about our human capacities by sharing in an action of discovering new things about the world. Thus "The Primrose Bush" by John Clare is a "poem about a thing," radically different from earlier "poetry about things" such as Vaughn's "Cock-Crowing" or Cowper's "Yardley Oak." Clare's poem "at once suspends

[1] THE PROUD KNOWLEDGE: POETRY, INSIGHT AND THE SELF, 1620–1920, by *John Holloway*. Routledge and Kegan Paul. $15.75.

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the reader in a moment of direct, heightened awareness . . . that thrusts aside the accumulated past." Such writing resembles not earlier poetry but scientific writing about the "wonderful *newness*" of knowledge that the microscope brought. Yet the microscopists Holloway cites emphasize that their instrument allows us to "discover an all wise providence," to recognize the power of "our Creator," to find nothing newer than a "divine original."

Holloway neglects the doubleness involved in "discovery." When Shakespeare's Miranda exults in her discovery of a "brave new world," Prospero replies, "'Tis new to thee." Holloway's "discovery" entails less a world in which man makes himself than one that has already been made for him. The belief that the universe has an intelligible structure to be discovered rejoins the old faiths that Holloway thinks us long free of. Thus Holloway cites Wordsworth's Alpine vision of "ultimate reality . . . appearing in total newness":

> Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light
> Were all like workings of one mind, the features
> Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
> Characters of the great Apocalypse,
> The types and symbols of eternity,
> Of first and last, and midst, and without end.

No remark follows on the traditional significances of "character," "type," "symbol"; on the recourse to the book of nature as parallel to God's book of revelation; or on the almost direct quotation from *Paradise Lost* in the last line. Such omissions make it hard to demonstrate the novelty of Wordsworth's construction. Neither time he discusses this passage does Holloway refer to the immediately preceding passage on imagination, where Wordsworth in composition made his real discovery, which takes him away from the visible world. For the imagination is the power by which the romantics understood the human mind not only to "perceive" but also to "half create" ("Tintern Abbey"). Even in reading as Wordsworth does "characters of the great Apocalypse," our activity is not merely discovery, unveiling, but is productive.

In contrast to Holloway's cognitive and external emphases stands the affectivity of Barbara Hardy.[2] She proposes her "essays on feeling in poetry" as a counter-statement, and many of her essays therefore begin by explicitly turning away from established critical writing on the poet under consideration. Such a turn brings much illumination, which makes Hardy's the most continuously interesting book of this group. Her apparent modesty of counter-statement yields, however, to a more severely legislative tone. We learn accordingly that "all the best art" gathers its "strengths and meanings from conscious and unconscious assembling" rather than through any "movement of literary reference"; that Plath's work characteristically is "tempted to be allegory, but refuses"; that in

[2] THE ADVANTAGE OF LYRIC: ESSAYS ON FEELING IN POETRY, by *Barbara Hardy*. Indiana University Press. $10.95.

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opposition to the Victorians, Yeats tried "to condense experience, as all lyric poets must, in the intense contemplation of moods and moments." Novelists dwell on the circumstances of character and history, but Hardy's lyric "offers little or no place for anything not incorporable into an emotional state." Therefore, any writer "concerned to analyze feelings," must, rather than lyrics, "write novels like Proust's." Hardy nonetheless recognizes Donne as a great lyric poet who "gives an anatomy of his passions, analytic and dissecting," for she is too intelligently responsive to maintain her theoretical assertions in practice. Yet such theorectical assertion is important to her, for it preserves the lyric as a form of pure feeling, in precious contrast to the "classifying, judging, and analyzing apparatus" of our "environment."

Hardy's basic position opposes that of New Criticism. She demands not complexity but purity: "Passionate experience, however much it may possess and transcend knowledge and irony, tends toward singleness." Lyric poetry, then, "thrives . . . on exclusions" and necessarily omits much of the "accustomed context and consequences of feeling" in order to speak in a "pure, lucid, and intense voice." Such exclusion makes lyric "more than usually opaque." Lyric's difficulty grows even greater because Hardy insists that lyric must avoid either naming or describing the feeling it embodies, lest it become either analytic or sentimental.

From this position Hardy reads poem XI from Auden's volume of 1928. She notes the difficulty arising from the specifically registered circumstances that are not explained to the reader and goes on to praise the poem's "laconic enactment" of feeling: "Feeling is not described at all, but implied by the reticent form and language, which decorously convey the pressure of the feeling, which is controlled in decent silence." But from such a description what justifies our taking the poem to concern feeling? Only the theoretical presupposition that lyrics must be about feeling warrants our hypothesizing a unifying feeling that enables us to establish coherence from otherwise baffling fragments. Rather more firmly than Hardy's description would suggest, however, the poem explicitly guides our reading. The poem is not silent about feeling: "love" recurs thrice; Auden even called the poem "The Love Letter." And if Hardy finds in the poem not love only but also "reticence," is it not because the poem ends with:

> The stone smile of this country god,
> That never was more reticent,
> Always afraid to say more than it meant.

Hardy's technique of reading, then, works closely from specific words; the feeling is not so mystifyingly conjured out of silence as her rhetoric would suggest.

Yet Hardy's reading fails to account for the fear ("Always afraid") in Auden's poem, and this simplifying omission suggests the further problem that her method poses. For example, her dread of allegory leads her to define the "passional drama" of Hopkins' sonnet beginning "Patience, hard thing" in terms of "two characters," "the human being and God."

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She recognizes that such a reading must "ignore the drama of image and personification." But what authorizes such ignoring? "Patience" not only begins the poem but recurs five times in the octave, as the subject of all the verbs; it is then absent until the final sentence, when its return allows the poem to end. Hardy never mentions how we get from this literal drama to the very different drama she defines. Her interpretation is not illegitimate, but the absence of reflectiveness makes the reading of poetry seem a puzzlingly arbitrary activity.

Such apparent arbitrariness has encouraged Norman Holland to use the diverse interpretations of Wordsworth's "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal" to argue that there is no literary "object," that only the various personal motivations of readers can account for such diversity.[3] Wordsworth's poem is even more reticent than Auden's. The only feeling named in the poem appears in the past and under negation, "I had no human fears." The opacity of such minimal characterization fits Hardy's model for lyric, but, contra Hardy, the poem crucially contains "history": the first stanza is set grammatically in the past, the second stanza in the present. Although Holland does not acknowledge it, this stanzaic division and its grammatical correlative underlie all the interpretations he cites. The literary object does then constrain and enable the readings that ensue from it, but we risk losing our object if like Hardy we seal our spirits in the wish to read immediately rather than reflectively.

Frances Ferguson defines the lost object of "A Slumber" not as the reader's but as the speaker's and poet's, for in the sequence of Wordsworth's "Lucy" poems there is an increasing attenuation both of "Lucy" and of the speaker's feelings for her, until in this final poem Lucy is not named or even personified: she only "seemed a thing."[4] Thus for Ferguson, in sharp contrast to Holloway, Wordsworth's poetics move "steadily toward the renunciation of the poet's claims to knowledge." Simultaneously, in opposition to Hardy, "self-expression becomes a conspicuously vexed enterprise," for the poet can only express "the deficiencies of his previous, deluded notions." Thus feeling seems ever more alien to the self that tries to define itself through possession of feeling.

Ferguson poses her challenge to the integral self through considering Wordsworth's attitudes toward language. At one moment, through close attention to language in reading Hopkins, Hardy approaches a position like Ferguson's.

> My own heart let me have more pity on; let
> Me live to my sad self hereafter kind,
> Charitable; not live this tormented mind
> With this tormented mind tormenting yet.

[3] Norman Holland, "Literary Interpretation and Three Phases of Psychoanalysis," *Critical Inquiry* 3 (1976): 221–33.

[4] WORDSWORTH: LANGUAGE AS COUNTER-SPIRIT, by *Frances Ferguson*. Yale University Press. $15.00.

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Hardy defines "the sense of verbal replacement" in these lines: "perhaps it is not a case of more having pity on the heart but being kind to the larger 'sad self', and in the next two lines the replacement is even more striking, as we replace the self which has replaced the heart with the mind." Such "verbal replacement" corresponds to Ferguson's Wordsworth, for she finds his poetry elegiac and his model of language in the epitaph, which always requires a lost object and a gap in time. Although Wordsworth wishes epitaphic language to be "an incarnation of thought," Ferguson emphasizes that any incarnation into language is "too little and too late" in relation to the vanished object, for which poetic language offers a substitution and replacement. Ferguson feels in Wordsworth "the pathos of the impossibility of recapturing one's past emotions," but she also recognizes that it would be a "greater horror . . . to recapture past emotion and to install it as the motif of an unchanging unitary self." For Wordsworth's poems "founded on the affections" (like "Michael" or "The Brothers") show the dangers for life of establishing such a unitary self and its world on the basis of feelings for others: in Wordsworth the loved object always passes away, desolating the existence of anyone who has so committed himself.

In contrast to the poems of affection, the "poems of imagination" reflect upon the vagaries of such attachment, revealing that the mind's power, not the object, is what makes a view of the world. This process of imaginative reflection Ferguson calls "self-reading" to suggest the necessary doubling and time-lag. Thus the later stanzas of the "Immortality Ode" "read" the first four stanzas, composed two years earlier, and thereby succeed in exorcising the sense of loss, of "something that is gone," like that which marks reliance upon affections, and instead asserting the power of the "philosophic mind." This power, however, gives no positive knowledge but only the capacity to pass beyond a given error. Ferguson can read Wordsworth's Alpine vision more attentively than Holloway, for she need not claim that the passage discovers new knowledge. Rather, in turning to "character" and "type" Wordsworth recognizes the apocalypse "in the only place it has ever been found—in books." Such "reading" opens up within the apocalyptic "last" things a renewed sense of being in the "midst, and without end."

Ferguson's "reading" emphasizes the processes that join a self to others, despite gaps of space and time, indeed that assemble a self through the language of others. This approach achieves a humane definition of Wordsworth as a social poet, in contrast to the emphases of Holloway and Hardy on individuality and exclusiveness. From Hardy's perspective such involvement with time and others makes Wordsworth's world more novelistic than lyric. Holloway briefly considers Tennyson's *Maude* in relation to Dickens, for both show the damage that society offers to the self that nonetheless cannot fully exist apart, but Ferguson's view implies even more. I think George Eliot's characters, who suffer also the shattering of the sole self and offer hope that a beneficent integration with others may follow, most closely approximate in the novel what Ferguson finds in

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Wordsworth. Like Wordsworth, too, George Eliot explicitly considers problems of language, yet I still find Eliot's concerns social, however sensitive an index language may be to social problems. I regret Ferguson's dwelling so wholly with language and avoiding any larger sense of the social. Certainly the eighteenth-century theorists of language, from whose thought Wordsworth's develops, saw language as necessarily involved in any consideration of human sociability, and, reciprocally, any consideration of language as involving attention to social circumstances.

Such social concerns, briefly touched by Holloway, implicit in Ferguson, banished from Hardy, form the center for Eric Homberger.[5] Homberger's "art of the real"—less the achievement of contemporary poetry than a stick for measuring and beating that poetry—is "an art that would acknowledge the existence of contingent values, other people, history itself." Homberger's wish for the "sheer actuality of experience" leads him into baldly naive realism, as in valuing the long poem because it alone "challenges the novel as an adequate reflector of our own times." Yet no more than Hardy does Homberger abide by his own programmatic statements. At moments he even condemns literature for excessive mirroring. The inadequacies of Berryman's *Dream Songs* and Lowell's *Notebook* result from their being "a perfect expression of the society in which they were written, juddering from disaster to disaster, swamped by abundance."

Homberger realizes that "immediate experience can never be an end in itself without impoverishing the imagination," but he doesn't know where to locate that resistant force of imagination, so richly at odds with immediate experience. For instance, the "historical sense" necessary for the "real" demands attention to "impersonal forces" rather than the "major protagonists" of Lowell's *History*. But is not the imagination itself a major protagonist? Thus too *Paterson* fails by overemphasizing the "discrete and independent," through lacking feeling for "the ways in which things [are] established in relations, social or political." Yet how can poems get away from "immediate experience" except by violating such "established relations" and setting up independent relations that aim towards the immediate through mediating techniques? Poetic technique not only keeps the immediate at a necessary distance but also joins the writer to a community of readers and other writers. For Homberger, however, any "interposition of technical imperatives between the poet and 'reality'" is defined as formalism, the grand villain of his book, a "new and potent mode of social control" for the Cold War establishment of the 50's. In formalist verse, "Rhymes . . . serve to intimidate the reader, to extract acquiescence; the word magic allows no time . . . to let the armored consciousness relax."

Homberger disregards the view that finds in strict form a means of escaping the vigilance of consciousness, of allowing displaced expression of materials that could not be directly confronted. This view contributes to Walter Benjamin's description of Baudelaire's accomplishment, but even

[5] THE ART OF THE REAL: Poetry in England and America since 1939, by *Eric Homberger*. Rowman and Littlefield. $10.95.

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though Homberger claims Benjamin's authority, he denounces as pure formalism a moment in which W. D. Snodgrass closely parallels Benjamin. Snodgrass argues that the poet imitates the processes of life by repressing his subject from consciousness so that the subject "can spread into the details, the style, the formal technique." Such return through indirection suggests how experience gets into poetry while allowing for an imaginative process that differentiates the poem from "sheer actuality." Without it Homberger finds himself always at an impasse.

Holloway's study of "new ways of constructing a poem" emphasizes productive activity, in contrast to the passive "experience and behavior" that Homberger praises in Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony* project. Holloway himself ends with the ordinary: Thomas Hardy's poetry empties out the proud self and becomes instead an "encyclopedic recorder of everyday human life." But Holloway's constructive emphasis allows him to find precise ways of describing how Hardy's verse achieves the effect of a dispersed self, open to the language of others. Holloway's formal responsiveness in this last chapter comes somewhat surprisingly. Most of his book seems fatigued when close to the language of poems, perhaps from fear that close analysis suits a traditional poetry of "rhetorical" manipulation better than his chosen poetry of independent discovery. Yet Holloway is often sharp in summary, if not in detail. Thus he observes in Keats's *Endymion* that the verbal energy flags at actions that carry on the quest-story but soars at moments of arrest that halt the quest but give us what we remember the poem for.

Another fatigue I feel in Holloway's procedure is lack of engagement with the recent American critics—Wasserman, Abrams, and Hartman come to mind—who share his interests. Such neglect is typical of Englishmen toward Americans, but Holloway has been different. Over twenty years ago he praised the Chicago critics' neoaristotelian idea of plot, as an escape from the verbalism of Eliot, Richards, and Empson, and this emphasis on plot gave vigor to Holloway's study of Shakespeare, *The Story of the Night* (1961). Some flagging, however, marks *Widening Horizons in English Verse* (1966) (based on lectures given in Chicago), for Holloway finds that widening is over. The forces of study and exploration that freed England from the enclosure of the classical have yielded to an exhausted insularity. *The Proud Knowledge* also senses an ending. Just as widening horizons opened to the Empire, so the "soaring intellectual ambitions" of Holloway's chosen poetic selves may seem now "mere bourgeois manifestations of the capitalist age." Though insisting that one must still recognize the achievement of what has been and its value for making a better future, Holloway here fails to name the better future. The work is retrospective and lacks the curiosity and openness so admirable in his earlier criticism. Comparing this book with Holloway's recent essays in *Critical Inquiry* (on the structural analysis of novels) suggests some self-compartmentalization. Holloway's Chicago self lives on, but not in this book.

I want finally to ask after a more thoroughly literary history than Holloway gives. Although his attention moves from the opening to the closing of a poetic possibility, there is little sense that it mattered to poets

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what their predecessors had written; each poem is rather related primarily to Holloway's guiding topic. One need not follow Harold Bloom's revisionism to recognize that especially in the nineteenth century, especially in a story that begins with Milton, the poetic past bears crucially on a poet's possibilities. Holloway's concern with "knowledge" turns away from literary knowledge, yet such knowledge is necessary for understanding what poets do. T. S. Eliot insisted like Holloway that "we *know* so much more" than the dead writers, but Eliot also recognized that "they are that which we know". For a history of poetry not only Holloway's proud knowledge is needed, but also this embarrassing knowledge.

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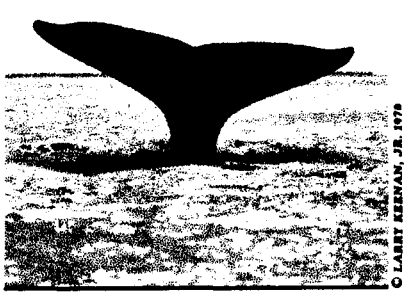

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ROBERT McDOWELL

Poetry Chronicle

FOR LUCK: POEMS 1962–1977,[1] BY H. L. VAN BRUNT, combines new work with selections from two previous books (*Uncertainties*, *Indian Territory and Other Poems*), and differs from most "collection books" in that it does not portray a poet working through various styles in search of one that is unquestionably his own. Instead, we discover a poet remarkable for thematic and stylistic consistency.

Like any good poet, Van Brunt is an astute observer. Man in the wilderness—a wilderness both physical and psychological—is his forte, and the best of these nature studies compare favorably to the best of the mountain poems by Morton Marcus. Throughout, I am impressed by a restrained exuberance and rare integrity. Poems like "Petrels," "For the People of Youghal," "Redwoods," "Alba," and "For the Mother of Us All" are so good in a quiet way, that criticism becomes meaningless. From the beginning, Van Brunt knows what he is about.

> Fires in the mountains,
> night winds, the drift of seas
> are all the same to me—
> my home is in my head.
> "The Homecoming"

If you are easily fooled you might say "so what? He's just another self-centered scribbler." But in an age when too many see themselves as likeable at the center of things, it is exhilarating to find a poet who knows just how humbling even a center can be. Listen to the end of "Gods," a poem so moving I wish I had space to quote it entire. The poet kneels beside the body of a slain deer,

> My hand upon his neck
> we felt that things were not quite right
> as though a spirit had been removed
> something so huge and wise and gentle
> it could have made sense of what we'd done
> all we had was a stiff-legged creature
> bleeding on the leaves
> we felt abandoned by a god.

There is not a wasted syllable in this discovery that even a triumph can have an acrid taste.

What saves Van Brunt, the self-examiner, from the unpleasant egotism that characterizes so many of the widely-published backslappers is his

[1] FOR LUCK: POEMS 1962-1977, by *H. L. Van Brunt*. Carnegie-Mellon University Press. $3.95 paperback.

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perspective. Like Emily Dickinson, he seldom passes judgment. He can be counted on to *see* all sides, to *understand* them, and to tell us in language that is elegant, tough and clear.

> I think of men whose lives sound like the wind
> whipping along the cliffs,
> whose heads
> sink as low in stout as the hills in winter fog,
> whose words tumble out of their mouths like birds—
> cursing the bays and skies,
> daydreaming of New York,
> Cousin Liam in Chicago,
> two hundred dollars a week.
> "Poem for the People of Youghal"

You won't find this poet among the squabblers of committees and parades, or lurking in ambush somewhere along the trail. He can be traced to the mythology of the western loner who lets you have it straight. His is a talent that won't be lulled by praise.

Bert Meyers is another writer who goes his own way. From *Sunlight on the Wall*,[2] another compilation of old and new work, I get the impression that the poet would readily sacrifice applause to be true to his poetic concerns. This alone will make many suspicious. For there is an almost malignant belief in current circulation that contemplation is false, that only *the moment* is appropriate subject matter for poetry. In the reaction against Tradition, we could be compared to the child who breaks away from his parents on a walk through the Fun House; after a few steps he hasn't the least idea where he stands. In this book Meyers retraces his steps. He takes Tradition in hand and carves out his own niche.

Meyer's themes are consistent, but his methods vary. A demanding craftsman, he is capable of the short, rhymed lyric:

> People turn their sprinklers on
> to watch the water girls
> dance on their lawn
> I don't go out
> until they've all gone in
> They might come near
> with large damp wings
> love and other things.
> "Madman Songs" part III

Nothing spectacular, no drums and lightning. But a sense of spirituality has been created that cannot be denied. It deserves better than to be written off as merely personal experience. In this case, the more personal the experience the better. Meyers excels in passages like this from "Once, in Autumn."

[2] SUNLIGHT ON THE WALL, by *Bert Meyers*. Kayak Books. $2.00 paperback.

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Each weekend, in our wild backyard
my father struggled with his flesh.
Where those blind boots touched the earth,
his big hands, tough as trucks, ran loose
killing the plants they couldn't name.

The language is simple without becoming moronic. The observations are dappled with melancholia, but they are not saturated by it. Meyers is repulsed by the brutality he sees and suffers, but he manages to assert himself. He retains his dignity and helps us to get in touch with our own. He deserves a close reading, particularly in this volume, which is beautifully illustrated by the English collagist, John Digby.

Galway Kinnell's *The Poems of François Villon*[3] is the best translation I have seen among the crop of new books. The strongest praise I can offer is to talk about it in an article in which I am concentrating on good books by American poets. Though the translator qualifies, the poet decidedly does not. And yet, Villon has so much to say to the typical American malcontent! All he needed was a a translator capable of comprehending his complexity and making it accessible for us. To those of us who do not know French, Villon's real gifts as a poet have remained almost as obscure as the facts about his life. Many unfortunate translations have succeeded only in giving the impression that Villon, were he alive today, would write for Hallmark or the Party Jokes column in *Playboy*.

Kinnell is never in danger of inadvertently ridiculing his subject. Appropriately, he is sensitive to the growth of the poet as it is revealed in the work. In "The Legacy," his Villon has all the satiric verve and wit I expect in a talented and volatile young poet. Though these qualities never completely disappear I am aware, thanks to Kinnell's insight, of other forces at work in "The Testament." I am gratefully aware of the mature poet whose expression is less a literary convention and more the weighty lamentation of an heroic soul. In just a few years the poet had grown prematurely old. He had suffered imprisonment, torture, humiliation. Misery and Death had ceased to be abstractions. For Villon the student, thief, vagabond and brawler, they had become real and close at hand.

This awakening, peculiar because forged in a time when Courtly Love was no antique memory, strongly links the poet Villon to the massive contradictions of modern life. In "The Legacy," "The Testament," and the shorter poems, we share the experience of a man who sees himself as a kind of perpetual exile. The bludgeoning by the State of the individual psyche is a crisis we and this mysterious writer unavoidably share. He teaches, by example, how a man retains his dignity and achieves inner peace.

The current translator brings this struggle into focus without sacrificing linguistic beauty. Though Kinnell for the most part refuses to duplicate the rhymed original, he manages to get across the *sense* of it in a way that is moving and entertaining. The result is an unusually readable collection, a

[3] THE POEMS OF FRANÇOIS VILLON, translated by *Galway Kinnell*. Houghton-Mifflin. $10.00; $5.95 paperback.

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language that is not quite American and not just another literal English rendition. It does not sound like a borrowed language, and perhaps most important, it does not sound like Galway Kinnell. I can't help feeling that it is as close to Villon, were he to appear among us padding his wallet with proceeds from a lecture tour across the United States, as any language I have encountered. It seems to have risen magically for the occasion.

David Swanger's poems reveal few of the weaknesses inherent in most first books. *The Shape of Waters*[4] is not condescending, technically inept, irresponsible or evasive. It provides no evidence that he would turn off the air in a baby's incubator or strap roller skates on his mother-in-law and shove her down the highway. Instead, it presents us with a portrait of a man who labors quietly at the craft of writing good poems, who does it with few complaints, who never once adopts the popular persona of mouthpiece for downtrodden squealers.

Yet he is also acutely aware of the de-humanizing contradictions of modern life. This familiarity is sounded convincingly in "Easter, Route #17," "The Children," "Random Objects and a Note," and others. In "The Last Wolf in North America Speaks," the wolf ends by telling Man "you have to live/with this: you have killed/efficiently as always/everything but need." And unlike many poets who come to grapple with this theme, Swanger is capable of refreshing humor.

> backwards your name is magic.
> Roterubrac. Roterubrac. Roterubrac.
> Move me! Make me go! Please.
> "Carburetor"

I, for one, could stand to see more of this quality in others.

The poems that are particularly commendable in this collection are those dealing with the poet's family. These are difficult for anybody to write well. It is easy to be too private, to appear to be merely precious. Yet it is here that Swanger is most compassionate. In "My Daughter's Morning" he is invigorated by "the durability of newness/and the beauty of my new one." In "Portraits of Children" the youngest child is a "Household Buddha" who "sits where placed and assumes wisdom/like all things firmly rooted."

The book is only occasionally betrayed by a too earnest desire to be clear about what is happening in the poem. In a few, a very few, instances, Swanger extends a metaphor needlessly, but he never stays untracked for long. He is compelled to write truthfully in a firm, fluid speech. The usual linguistic abstractions have been cut away. In his first book, Swanger has already begun to meet the great demands of his craft.

The next two books are also "new and selected" collections. Both display an impressive "working through" of individual style; both are undeniably important, and they are also, at times, exasperating and irritating. Their inconsistencies lead us to question the sensibilities that made them. This will make the poems particularly appealing to readers

[4] THE SHAPE OF WATERS, by *David Swanger*. Ithaca House. $3.50 paperback.

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who prefer, in individual works, abundant examples of how to—and how not to—write. Both books raise the question: how many concessions am I, the reader, willing to make *before* the poet creates a situation in which the query becomes meaningless. It is not a question spun out of critical doubletalk; it is one that every good writer should ask of himself. If he doesn't, there are plenty of readers who will. It is a question of common sense and responsibility, and the poet must face up to it.

If there are times when Barbara Howes's poems sound artificial, there are also times when they possess exceptional loveliness. It is the risk that any formal poet runs in our age. *A Private Signal*[5] is an admirable declaration by Howes that she will write as she pleases, not to suit a modern convention. Reading this book is like taking a tour through the memorable assembly plant of classic verse constructions. It is to the poet's credit that, in spite of the uneven product, she manages to sustain interest and kindle, as I have said before, admiration.

Howes possesses intelligence and a sense of delicacy that sets her apart from most poets. Her intelligence is often the most noticeable feature of her poems. In supple lyrics she examines the territory of love, the composition of the landscape, European museums and travel stops. Her few attempts at a modified brand of free verse betray the fact that her heart isn't in it, and they usually peter out in a concluding rhymed couplet. It doesn't matter. This poet should not be writing free verse. I am beholden to anybody who can describe a cat as "quicksilver from a dropped thermometer," or relatives whose "eyes go out on stalks like crabs' to the closet," or light as "a presence/one turns round to face/leans into and joins," or a cow whose eyes "thicken to rubber." Anybody who can write the delightful "Portrait of the Boy as Artist," which ends "Clear-eyed he sallies forth upon the field,/Holding close to his ear the shell of the world," deserves enthusiastic praise. Such moments offset the occasional excess of adjectives, the too, too clever wordplay, the aura of distance between subject and poet, the uncomfortable feeling that inspiration is of the calculated, book-learning sort so destructive to the Muse.

A Private Signal is an important collection because it plainly shows us what happens when a poet is just right, as well as what happens when she goes too far or not far enough. Also, it puts us in touch with a powerful English—not wholly American—Tradition. Most of the poems are like still-lifes. The best of them are beautiful, and they change us as good poetry should. I wish she wrote up to her best more often, but the fact that she does so at all, in her chosen style, is something.

Michael S. Harper's style has little in common with the style of Barbara Howes, but his *Images of Kin*[6] shares many of the strengths—and weaknesses—of *A Private Signal*. Harper is another poet whose intelligence inside the poem is very obvious, and sometimes oppressive. At such times it either assumes that the reader knows as much about a topic as the poet, or it simply doesn't care. Either way, the poet falls short of fulfilling his

[5] A PRIVATE SIGNAL, by *Barbara Howes*. Wesleyan University Press. $8.50; $4.45 paperback.

[6] IMAGES OF KIN, by *Michael S. Harper*. University of Illinois Press. $8.95.

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responsibility. In his desire to give his knowledge free rein, Harper often constructs poems out of what appear to be random images. There is little attempt to *make sense* in the poem, to present a logical—or logically illogical—progression. The necessary reference points are too private. This is especially true in the sections entitled "Healing Songs," "Uplift from a Dark Tower," "Debridement," and "Song: I Want a Witness." There are many worthwhile exceptions in these sections, but the general impression stands.

An occasionally destructive inclination to instruct compounds the error of evasiveness. Both errors spring from a sensibility that would institute change in the reader by force, not by example. The poet forgets that the best poetry does not lecture.

Harper's poems are most effective when forged in a lyric concept. His is a lyricism that is almost disguised, partly because the poet stretches it out to approximate a more conversational speech, and partly because it is periodically consumed by other forces. The worst of these is street talk, which unfortunately sounds like Berryman's minstrel creation; another is the abstract lexicon of the historical lecturer. When Harper wastes his time with contrived constructions, or begins to drone on like a college professor, he goes nowhere. In such guises he has no more to say than millions of other concerned people.

Still, there are for the reader moments of intense satisfaction, moments when the poet's individuality becomes almost universal, as in the poems about a son's death, or a relative's illness. At times, Harper is capable of an almost ministerial power. His is the poetry of anguish, hard to take but rewarding. Like Howes, he is an uneven talent. Both command respect and, at times, amazement.

I detect the strong air of spontaneity in the poems of Colette Inez. *Alive and Taking Names*[7] is so rich with this quality that the poems just seem to "happen." There is considerably more at work than chance, though improvisation is the single dominant characteristic of her worst poems. But whether she is good, bad, or in-between, Inez never loses the reader's interest. Like *the* girl at the soda shop, her brazen attitude and unrestrained energy make us take notice. And like that mythical American charmer, she sometimes appears to be two entirely different individuals.

One, the true poet, watches and comments with compassionate honesty on the world around her.

> The contained are asleep in their clouds
> but the young are like fire,
> orange and red tongues in the dark
> igniting the old from the fog of their dreams.
> "Far in the Blindness of Time"

The poet is involved yet not involved. She has the distance wisdom demands. She touches some chord that makes us better than we are. And her methods are so diverse! Plainly, she is in love with words. Her more

[7] ALIVE AND TALKING NAMES, by *Colette Inez*. Ohio University Press. $7.00; $3.50 paperback.

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formal poems contain some of the most unobtrusive—and most effective—rhymes I have seen in recent poetry. She frequently evokes the surprise image and either surpasses expectations or falls below them. She is never so predictable as to meet them. Her broad talents will lead many to conclude that she is an undisciplined writer, and there are times when the high-wire act does seem to be just for the sake of the show.

> Morf. The dog barks.
> Form for the poem.
> Meop, the cat.
> Listen to the apertures.
> Look for the throat that shapes the bark,
> the mouth of the cat.
> "Tunnel, Funnel, Perpendicular, Blue"

The wordplay is excessive; the total effect makes me think of Dali or a poet laureate for the Space Program. Though the writing is interesting it is not poetry. If my absolutism is offensive, perhaps we can agree it is not *good* poetry.

Good or not, when I consider the book as a whole it doesn't matter. It is good for poetry and good for Inez to push past the limits of a successful piece of writing. For when she comes back into focus, Inez comes with a deeper vision than the cozily bracketed practitioners of verse. I never get the feeling that she is writing to impress anybody; she means to test herself, to learn and make keen judgments with that knowledge in hand. When she writes poorly, when she assumes a prosaic persona and constructs topical poems that seem to be gleaned from newspapers, history books, or the experience of somebody else, I feel that the real Inez is just testing, that she will soon reclaim her own voice with an important revelation. Her curiosity is insatiable, her intuition is vibrant and somehow right. It is a joy to observe her vivid language at work. I believe that poetry, to her, is fun, and this refreshingly sets her apart from so many of the dog-faced boys. Inez is always electric, and sometimes she is at the heart of exceptional poetry.

Laura Jensen has written a book, *Bad Boats*,[8] that is sure to receive a lot of attention. Unfortunately, much of it will be for the wrong reasons. She is a versatile young poet whose work is always lively, whose skillful observations never overrate her own importance. In her world the poet is just another element, not a loud ringmaster in a sequined tux. She avoids, or has already outgrown, the guise most often befitting a young poet, that of the creature of limited experience looking at herself. Even in the few poems in which her presence is a tangible part, it is transformed into a universal being.

> while they are young
> the old provide
> the moon gets full and looks down judging

[8] BAD BOATS, by *Laura Jensen*. Ecco Press. $6.95.

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not the maze of anger
but the fury
at the wasted years,
at the waste of the tender snow.
Wasted, wasted, the birds crackle,
wasted on you.
"Heavy Snowfall in a Year Gone Past"

I have said that this book will often be praised for the wrong reasons. Many, especially the ardent proponents of the young, will want to call it an exceptional book, implying that the poet can expect to be lured to Hollywood or the Himalayas to prepare for the arrival of her legion of imitators. *Bad Boats* is not an exceptional book; it is one in which the poems race from one beautiful moment to another, but the course between is full of potholes. The problem is fairly common, especially among Jensen's less-talented peers. It is the result of a lack of patience and, again, common sense. Many poets are too readily seduced by the sensational, by the startling image designed to jar the habitually lethargic reader. The pressure to produce such an image, often at the expense of making sense in the poem, is constantly applied by teachers, friends, and publishers (this is where current writing schools are bad, if they are bad at all). The consequent failure to achieve the perfect sense of the poem is an unconscious one on the part of the poet, but it is a failure nonetheless. Any sensitive reader cannot help but be aware of it. Instead of being seduced by the sensational, he feels as if he has merely bumped heads with the mediocre. Jensen's title poem provides a timely example.

They are like women because they sway.
They are like men because they swagger.
They are like lions because they are king here.
They walk on the sea. The drifting
logs are good: they are taking their punishment.
But the bad boats are ready to be bad,
to overturn in water, to demolish the swagger
and the sway. They are bad boats
because they cannot wind their own rope
or guide themselves neatly close to the wharf.
In their egomania they are glad
for the burden of the storm the men are shirking
when they go off their coffee and yawn.
They are bad boats and they hate their anchors.
"Bad Boats"

The sense here has not been brought into focus. Every line is good, but the lines don't really work together. The reason is that the poet's attitude toward her subject has not been clarified. *Why* are the boats bad? They are bad because of their initiative *and* because they lack it. They are bad because they would "demolish the swagger and the sway," then because "they cannot wind their own rope." In a short poem you can't have it both

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ways. The poet must take a side. As it stands, "Bad Boats" is a not very satisfactory poem that exists too much for the sake of its wonderful last line; and a poem that lives for its last line quickly assumes the posture of a stale joke with an all-too-predictable punch line. This should not happen to a poem in which, as I have said, all the lines are excellent and the basic idea is intriguing.

This problem is found in too much poetry to be ignored, but it is easily corrected with a little more thought, a little more work. If I use Jensen as an example, it is because she is so much better than the common violator. The poem is more important than the individual image, and there are times when this poet remembers and shows us what she can do. "House Is an Enigma," "The Cloud Parade," "Dreaming of Horses," and "An Age" are fine poems displaying a tough sensibility, a hyper-active intelligence, and thorough "working out" of the subject matter. At her best Jensen is better than almost any of the young poets writing today. *Bad Boats* is one uneven book that is worth the reader's time. It is full of bad writing—of a high caliber—, but it is also full of moments that make me feel as if I have made an important discovery.

It is difficult, in the space of this article, to examine adequately the exceptional qualities of Thomas Merton—because they are so many. If you tried to come up with the components that go into the making of a first-rate poet, your prototype might bear an uncanny resemblance to him. Put simply, Merton is one of our great poetic talents of this century. If anybody has doubts, the *Collected Poems*[9] should quickly dispel them. Reading the work entire is like entering a unique world created just for the occasion. It is no hasty construction, but a self-sustaining environment in which the landscape has been filled out, in which the living and the dead are real. It is as if the poet had tasted and understood every essence that makes up the world we live in, and out of the banquet proceeded to remake it and shape his own. Isn't this the ultimate aim of poetry?

Merton's life was strangely suited to the attainment of this end. Though he lived his last twenty-seven years in the Monastery of Our Lady of Gethsemane where he enjoyed the rare and constant solitude so many poets dream of, Merton never withdrew from Man in a spiritual sense. It is true that he felt revulsion from the world outside—sometimes with compassion, and sometimes without it—but he always somehow *saw* the world.

> Everywhere there is optimism without love
> And pessimism without understanding,
> They who have new clothes, and smell of haircuts
> Cannot agree to be at peace
> With their own images, shadowing them in windows
> From store to store.
>
> "How to Enter a Big City" Part III

If what he saw was profound, he was a reluctant prophet. He never

[9] COLLECTED POEMS OF THOMAS MERTON. New Directions. $37.50.

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exaggerated his individual worth, though his vision was uncompromising and often tinged with an almost late Yeatsian rage.

> Go, stubborn talker,
> Find you a station on the loud world's corners,
> And try there, (if your hand be clean) your length
> of patience:
> Use there the rhythms that upset my silences,
> And spend your pennyworth of prayer
> There in the clamor of the Christless avenues;
>
> And try to ransom some one prisoner
> Out of those walls of traffic, out of the wheels
> of that unhappiness!
>
> "The Poet, to His Book"

Also, Merton resembles Yeats in that he continued to grow as a writer. From his formal early poems to his late experiments in Surrealism, the voice remains vital and believable. It is seldom too religious, too metaphysical, too much the social critic; it is a combination of all of these, a large voice emerging to embody a large country. If the voice is not wholly American (it sometimes has the international flavor of Howes) it is, first and last, erudite and convincing. But it is American often enough for us to call it our own, to point to it as an example to young poets who should stay at home and begin to observe their language and their land. It is the modern American voice in which the corporate and the spiritual Man become one.

Merton's language never sacrifices beauty for shock value nor truth for the secure and unimaginative ring of an opinion that is either too personal or too popular. No matter how odd the style, or how tentative the subject, he always *makes sense* in the poem. One comes to this book and quickly forgets criticism.

One comes to this book . . . one should. It contains all of the published books; it includes two collections of unpublished poems, translations from several languages, a forgettable section of concrete poetry, and humorous verse. It is a book that every serious reader of poetry will want to possess, but the publisher has seen to it that few will be able to afford it. Conviction must, at some point, take precedence over the ringing of a cash register. I consider the price of this book and I wonder what the poet, a boisterous opponent of Materialism, would think of it. How could he help but feel that his life's work had been commandeered by merchants in the temple? It is unfortunate that such bad judgment should mar a rare, celebratory occasion. There is a great need anywhere for a poet like Thomas Merton. "Though we may run/in the dark, our destiny is full of glory." This is what poetry is all about. Call it nobility if you must; call it anything you like. We can use it.

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HAYDEN CARRUTH

The Spirit of Lo lenga d'òc

In the preface to his Six Troubadour Songs,[1] W. D. Snodgrass writes: "In the last two decades, our vision of the Provençal Troubadour and his songs has almost completely changed. Gone is the wistful figure singing sweetly in the twilight of his spiritual devotion to a far-off, idealized lady. Under the impact of certain crucial musicologists and performers—especially Thomas Binkley's Studio for Early Music in Munich—we have accepted a heavy Arabic influence in this music; nowadays, our performances sound more and more like belly-dance music or, more accurately, the Andalusian music of North Africa. Cur sense of the texts has altered comparably. By now, we are almost ready to say that Troubadour songs have only two subjects: one, let's go Crusading and kill lots of Moors; two, let's go get in the boss's wife."

Now this is ridiculous on several counts. Naturally in recent studies of medieval Occitanian literature and music we have experienced a movement toward deromanticization similar to what we know in other sectors of scholarship; but no serious student would go as far as Snodgrass suggests. In the first place, what's wrong with Arabic music? Simply because it has been used in North America primarily as an adjunct to drooling tent-shows does not mean that in its own time and place it did not and does not serve far different and more various purposes. Listen to flamenco. I know nothing of Thomas Binkley, but if he has discovered a Moorish explicit element in Mediterranean art, thought, and life, he has discovered what has been known to everyone concerned for hundreds of years. ("Nous retrouvons enfin à travers les échos des croisades de nombreuses évocations de l'Orient et leurs relations incessantes avec le monde arabe sont largement connues": Leon Còrdas, *Trobadors al Segle XX,* Arles, 1975, p. 11.) Today if we look at the trobadors more in an existential than Edwardian spirit, this does not mean that anyone with sense ever considered them "wistful figures singing sweetly in the twilight"; nor does it mean that we may discard sound historical evidence. What is one to do with *trobar clus,* the courts of love or the great Consistori del Gai Saber (established in Toulouse in 1323 to study and sustain not only *las leis d'amor,* i.e. the laws of love, but the linguistic and esthetic qualities of its poetry), the *croix languedocienne* with its hearts which we still see in churches all over the Midi, the concepts of *paratge* (honor), *jòi, prètz* (merit), *valor,* and *mesura* (wisdom) which we find at the center of so much of the literature? No, it was a unified nation and unified culture; religion, at least partly Catharist, was its source and energy (what else would we expect in the medieval world?), and its literature was *not* frivolous. Can anyone imagine the work of Guinicelli, Cavalcante, and Dante springing from the conventions of the music hall?

[1] SIX TROUBADOUR SONGS, by *W. D. Snodgrass.* Burning Deck. $2.50.

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The first translation in Snodgrass's booklet is of the famous "L'Aventura del Gat," by Guilhèm de Peitieu, which is uncharacteristic of the poetry as a whole. It is out-and-out bawdry. (Translated many times and once even published, as Snodgrass points out, in *Playboy,* it is the fantasy of a poet who pretends to be mute, and by thus securing them from scandal heroically enjoys two noblemen's wives.) But bawdry it may be, sophisticated vulgarity it is not—and the difference is essential. Guilhèm, the earliest trobador whose name is known to us, was a nobleman (duc d'Aquitaine, comte de Poitiers), intelligent and educated, a poet who certainly was aware of his antecedents from Catullus to the Goliards. His writing, like his attitudes, was firm, straightforward, verbally and prosodically vigorous, obviously the product of a superior poetic imagination. I suppose the closest well-known analogue in English is the Chaucer of the "Miller's Tale." Here is the third stanza of Guilhèm's poem.

En Avèrnha vèrs Lemosin
encontrèri sus mon camin
las gentas molhèrs d'En Garin
e d'En Bernat.
Me saludèron simplament
per Sant Launart.

What could be plainer, in spite of the somewhat intricate rhyme and meter? Here is Snodgrass's translation.

Down in Auvergne, past Limousin,
Out wandering on the sly I ran
Into the wives of Sir Guarin
And Sir Bernard;
They spoke a proper welcome then
By St. Leonard.

Where does Snodgrass get those extra words—"down," "out wandering on the sly," "spoke a proper welcome then"? It is much too overwritten. And the meaning of "per Sant Launart" ("in the name of") is not transmitted, while the syntax and prosody (the enjambment) are too complex. But mainly the *tone* is wrong. I don't think it is simply the similarity of stanza forms that makes me think of Robert Burns; not the Burns of the lovely folk restorations, but the Burns of the comic narratives, epistles, and satires. Yet it's a lang, lang way from 12th-century France to 18th-century Scotland. And the translation shows further overlays as well: Byronesque irony, the jiggery of *The Ingoldsby Legends,* something of Carroll and Lear, a good deal of the archness of Samuel Hoffenstein and Noel Coward; in short, the culture of "high pops" for the past two hundred years. So it goes throughout Snodgrass's versions.

Toward the end of the poem Guilhèm says, "Tant las fotèri, m'ausiretz,/cent e quatre-vint uèit fes." Snodgrass writes: "I screwed them, fairly to relate/A full one hundred eighty eight." Forget "fairly to

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relate" and "a full"; forget the jingly meter; "fotèri" means "fucked," a good old Indo-European word (see Partridge, *Origins*). Why does Snodgrass write "screwed"? I presume exactly because it has the quality of cute sophisticated vulgarity which he likes but which has nothing to do with Guilhèm's straightforwardness or with the practice of trobadors in general.

As for the musical part of Snodgrass's work, since far fewer tunes than poems survive from the culture of Languedoc, he has shifted melodies which originally went with other poems to the poems he has translated and then to his own translations as well. The first part of this seems more or less reasonable; the old texts are singable in the tunes he has given them. But the second part? Why translate the texts but not the music? In fact Snodgrass's lyrics would go much better to something by Cole Porter than they do to the old Catalan airs.

The most important point I wish to make, however, has little to do with Snodgrass, although his preface has brought it to my mind. He refers there to "the Provençal Troubadours," but it is a mistake; a mistake, granted, with long historical precedence, going back to the ancient name for southern Gaul (*Provincia romana*) and much reinforced by the work of Frédéric Mistral and the Félibrige a century ago, a great but sometimes misguided work of revival; yet it is a mistake nevertheless. Whereas Mistral and most of his 19th-century co-workers actually did live in Provence, the trobadors came from all over the Midi, and the center of cultural activity was definitely west of the Rhône. The poets used a language that did not exactly correspond to any of the dialects of Occitan, a *koinê*, a literary language. It was not Provençal any more than it was Limosin, Gascon, Auvergnat, Catalan, or any of the others. No one knows how it came into being, but that it existed before the earliest trobar lyrics is proven by surviving administrative and juridical texts.

Apparently Dante invented the term *langue d'oc* (*De Vulgari Eloquentia*, I, 7, where he opposes it to *langue d'oïl* and *langue du si*, only of course in medieval Latin, *lingua d'oco*, etc.), but the people of southern Gaul soon took it to themselves as the name of their own country. (Simone Weil: "Ils avaient même un nom pour désigner la patrie; ils l'appelaient le langage.") So it appears on maps for centuries: Languedoc. But this did not include the whole area in which Occitan was and is spoken, so today Occitan is the preferred word for the language, and Occitania is the whole region south of Lyons, from the Atlantic to the Alps. A real revival, I feel almost an explosion, of Occitanian culture is happening.

Why is this important? Because the Albigensian Crusade—which is called more accurately by its victims, past and present, "la guerre de conquête"; even Innocent III, who ordered it, admitted that as many catholics as heretics were killed—is still going on. We think of France as a monolithic state, in spite of its "democratic" trappings, and indeed it is, a nation ruled by one city. Simon de Montfort's brutal invasion was turned back finally by the courageous people of Toulouse, but the damage was done; and politically, economically, socially, and linguistically the conquest he began has never ended. Today it is proceeding more thoroughly

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than ever. The bankers, industrialists, developers—well, theirs is an enormous, dismaying devastation, too big to discuss here. We must stay with the linguistic aspect. Paris controls the radio, the television, and the schools, and French is the only language permitted. Yet there are *seven other living languages* in France: Breton, Flemish, Basque, Sardinian (i.e. in Corsica), Alsatian, Catalan, and—the largest in respect of number of speakers—Occitan. In 1972 the Association internationale pour la Défense des Langues et Cultures menacées passed a resolution of condemnation against France for "cultural genocide." If the effort was feeble, the term was exact.

I have heard Occitan spoken in the countryside of the Ardèche. (Some scholars say that the purest speech remaining is in the village of Largentière.) It *is* a language. One must insist on that because Parisian academic and other snobs call it "le patois," and so, in their ignorance, do many of the *paysans* who speak it. But it is the clear descendant of langue d'oc, a Romance language with as much historical autonomy as French, Italian, Spanish, or any other. In the cities, Nîmes, Montpellier, Toulouse, thousands who have lost its use, chiefly young people, are relearning it, studying in schools they have organized themselves. Hundreds of publications appear in it, both literary and journalistic. And all this activity is allied to vigorous action in the political and economic spheres. The commonest graffiti in the Midi are "Décolonisez l'Occitanie!" "Mort aux toutes Franchistes!" etc. Almost every car in the south of France has a decal saying "Oc" in the window; the word is painted and sprayed everywhere, I think literally on millions of walls, roadsigns, bridges—every available space. There is no question of separation, of course. France is not Canada. Québec may secede, but for Occitania it is impossible, constitutionally or any other way. The people don't ask for that, and I think very few would even wish for it. What they do ask for is recognition and perhaps some measure of reparations. The force of centrality is massive, we know, in France as elsewhere, but the force of regional feeling is not negligible. Against administrative might it offers moral, cultural, and linguistic right. It has worked elsewhere; possibly it may work in France.

The least we can do is acknowledge it. We can call the people by their right name, Occitanians, their language by its right name, Occitan, and their great poets by their right name, Trobadors.[2]

[2] To those who wish a brief, recent account of Occitan I recommended highly *La Langue Occitane*, by Pierre Bec, no. 1059 in the "Que sais-je?" series (Paris, Presses Universitaries de France, 1973). There are many larger studies, of course. One of the most respected is *Histoire de la littérature occitane*, by Charles Camproux (Paris, Payot, 1970). Another is *Trobar*, by Robert Lafont (Centre d'Etudes Occitanes de Montpellier, 1973).

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

The Anne Sexton Show

"ALL IS RUSH OR PAIN OR SHIT OR GLORY. I think my life is becoming like the Perils of Pauline. It is exaggerating itself." These sentences from a letter written in the year of Anne Sexton's death come as no surprise to the reader who has persisted thus far in this thick book.[1] For "it" always had been exaggerating itself, and now just a few years later it's still going strong: Joyce Carol Oates speaks of her poetry as "a triumphant event in our literature," and Erica Jong claims she is "one of those few writers by whom our age will be known in time to come." Maybe so, or maybe, as Leavis once said about the Sitwells, she will turn out to belong more to the history of publicity than of poetry. At any rate her "self-portrait in letters" is very powerful publicity. There is something to be learned from it about the American poetry scene over the past twenty years; though just what may be learned from contemplating the life of Anne Sexton isn't quite so clear.

To read these letters, ably edited by Sexton's elder daughter and Lois Ames, who is writing the poet's biography, one must banish complicated thoughts about the appropriateness of peering into privacies, secrets, inticacies. Anne Sexton was never loath to put herself on display (she speaks at one point of "doing" a Sexton) and would not I think have been disturbed if she were confronted with the present book. The editorial commentary is first rate, extensive, and largely avoids caressing sentimentality towards its subject. And the pictures are very fine indeed. But it should be clear at the outset that there's no point in defending perusal of the letters on the grounds that they will help us better understand the poems, or some such piously fraudulent claim. The poems are perfectly understandable without them and feel no better or worse than they did before we had the letters. There is no figure in the poetry's carpet to worry about discovering—it's all smack on the surface. What do we learn, then, as we watch this self-portrait shape itself before us?

Anne Sexton was born into a prosperous New England family, her father the owner of the R. C. Harvey Woollen firm. The Harveys lived in a spacious home in Weston, Mass., four stories complete with servants' quarters; their summer haunt (along with other branches of the family) was seven large houses near Boothbay Barbor, Maine. Anne went to school in Wellesley, was "boy-crazy" (as she later termed it), flirtatious, sought-after. Sent away to private school she played center on the basketball team, her nickname "Frog Legs Harvey." The editors provide us with one small atrocity story each about Mom and Dad: Anne had begun to write poetry but was accused of plagiarism by her mother, momentarily damping her ardor. She also developed a bad case of acne, came home to

[1] ANNE SEXTON: A Self-Portrait in Letters, ed, by *Linda Gray Sexton* and *Lois Ames*. Houghton-Mifflin $15.00.

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visit a dermatologist, and on one occasion her father left the dinner table, informing her that "the sight of her took his appetite away," a remark straight out of an Edward Gorey saga. No scrupulous concealment of feelings in the Harvey family, evidently.

School was an experience of small significance, and at nineteen she met Alfred ("Kayo") Sexton at the Longwood Cricket Club, fell in love, and eloped with him to Florida. She writes her parents about how happy she is, preparing wonderful culinary treats for her man:

> This morning we had coffee cake with our breakfast. We both thought it was delicious and it was. Tonight I made pineapple muffins—they were muffins with little bits of chopped up pineapple in them and they were also very edible. In fact I get two gold stars for today.

And although her first apple pie was not as successful, she is doing well with the food budget, while the "electric blanket works like a miracle." Consciousness-raised feminists are by this time nodding their heads in sad ecstasies of I-could-have-told-her-so's, and they could have, but who would accuse that coffee cake of being any less fulfilling than she thought it was? They were a handsome couple; one 1951 photgraph shows them on a fishing trip together, holding a very large fish, with the look of marital solidarity. Then Kayo was called to the Korean war, Anne tried modeling, and in 1953 had her first child.

Her bouts of depression seem to have begun soon afterwards, then the first suicide attempt and hospitalization at a "lodge" in Westwood, Mass. Her second child was born in 1955, whereupon things got worse. On one disastrous occasion Anne threw her older child across the room; again she was hospitalized, the children dispersed among their capable grandparents. Kayo was frequently on the road, selling wool for his father-in-law's firm, and Anne began to be serious about writing poetry. Encouraged by her psychiatrist, Sidney Martin ("You, Dr. Martin, walk/from breakfast to madness," begins the first poem in her first volume) she enrolled in John Holmes's poetry class at the Boston Center for Adult Education. There followed in rapid succession the death of both her parents, publication of her first poems in some newspapers, then their acceptance by New York literary magazines, this one in particular. Further study with W. D. Snodgrass at Antioch and Robert Lowell at B.U. brought her fully into the poetry trade and, at age 31, publication of *To Bedlam and Part Way Back,* the best book of poems she was ever to write.

"John Holmes is having a small party for John C. Ransom next Wed. night and has asked me so maybe I will meet someone who will decide to discover me" she tells Snodgrass ("Snodsie") in 1959, with an engaging touch of humor. There were lots of these poetry parties where "we sat around and read our poems aloud . . . Wilbur, Holmes, Dave Ferry, Phil Booth, Maxine [Kumin], Me, George Starbuck and some others I forget. and that was kind of fun. But still all very political and 'who do *you* know' and 'do you have a new book in process'. And . . . Wilbur, by the way, is a doll. Very handsome and handsome himself. His wife is a go-jus creature

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. . ." Heady stuff it must have been. She writes to Carolyn Kizer—who had already suggested to Anne that it might be good occasionally to "turn down the volume knob" on her poetry—that she has "all in all" a happy marriage to a good husband who is a business man, but that she would be "no one at all without my new tight little world of poet friends. I am kind of a secret beatnik hiding in the suburbs in my square house on a dull street." (The year is 1959, year of the beatnik.) But she didn't suddenly get healthy, hardworking and life-oriented. Writing to Snodgrass in 1959, she mentions her blackouts, which have lasted as long as 24 hours, and in June of that year there is the following, also to Snodgrass:

> I have been having a terrible time lately. A week ago at this time I was in "the summer hotel" (local institution for nervous breakdowns [. . .]). God knows what was wrong with me. I just sat in there and cried. For 3 days. I didn't eat or sleep. I just cried. Then I got hold of myself and got out. My Doctor is against institutions and always persuades me to leave. For 3 days it cost me $92.00 . . .!!! Pretty expensive tears I would say. I haven't cried since at any rate.

And she follows with the declaration she would make more than once: "Poetry and poetry alone has saved my life."

The declaration must be respected, considering who made it. Yet "it is [again] exaggerating itself"—at least "poetry" has now got a lot to live up to. As for those frail vessels, the poets who write it, they usually fell by the wayside trying to keep up with Anne's epistolary demands. Her editors tell us that Snodgrass, like other correspondents, began to resist these demands, finding that he "could not reply as often, as promptly, and as thoroughly as Anne asked." It might also have had something to do with matters of eros: "I'm not in love with you but I seem to keep acting that way," she wrote him, in a typically Sextonish tease. "Dear Love of a Hollis," was the salutation Hollis Summers received: "I, frankly do not mind your not being in love with me. Really. No need to be in love with me." And after a "lovely, full, rushing right day" spent with Anthony Hecht, she salutes him with an "Oh Tony" and tells him she's learning to love people (like Hecht) "without having to prove it by sleeping with you." One of many letters to the pseudonymous "Brother Dennis Farrell," a real live monk, opens "You are awfully handsome to be a monk" and then proceeds to lay it on even thicker with "You are just as lovely and medieval and romantic to me as you were in the first place (only handsomer) . . ." This pen-pal later left the church. Even James Dickey, who had written what the editors call a "brutal review" of *All My Pretty Ones* (he did not, that is, like the poems) is fed the following exciting line: "Sometimes, on readings for instance, I feel that everywhere I go I could find a lover—and I do not want a lover. I want a friend." Hard for the recipient to avoid saying, "surely she's talking about *me*!" Dickey, however, continued to dislike the poetry.

Meanwhile back in the wool trade there was husband Kayo, being a businessman. "My husband loathes poetry and does not care too much

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(at all) about his wife being this poet-person," she tells "Dennis" the monk in 1962. And again she writes him that "I'm glad you are not stable and I don't even want or need you to be. My husband is so stable that he fulfills that need. He is so stable that he is a complete conformist, a middleclass lawn grower, good father, good golfer, nice all around guy . . . He doesn't ask questions . . . even of me . . ." Kayo Sexton was very stable, very *there* in the fall of 1963 when Anne took an ill-fated European trip and had to come home in defeat two months early. Almost immediately upon arrival in Europe she wishes she were back home: "I'm not really a poet, just a button, who loves you forever and wants to be home . . . Oh! Boots!—I'm your Princess Anne—(as you call me) who only wants to be your button." And in an extraordinary peroration: "Do you know that you are the father that never loved me, the lover who made me a woman, the friend who taught me how to enjoy life, the brother to share laughter with, the son I'd like to have? Do you know?" It is not for us to know how much Kayo Sexton knew, but, like poetry, he had a lot to live up to. Eventually she dragged him into analysis.

As she became successful she grew more competitive: "I want my poems to be better than anyone else's. I do. Because (one reason anyhow) I wrote and rewrote them." This single-minded drive goes along with the fear that somebody or other will "axe" her, though in fact, as with other young poets in the late fifties, she received too much quick adulation and received far too little serious criticism from her fellow poets, busy as they were with being supportive of one another. By 1961, when she came to give a reading at Amherst (not, I presume, one of those "dreary towns" the editors refer to as making up the "college circuit") she was flushed with the thrill of it all: "I'm reading at Amherst next Friday [she writes Snodgrass] and it scares me because I shake . . . but the money is great. [We were rich back then.] This reading is a real racket . . . a fine one! Hope you can make the B.C. thing . . . so you can hold my hand if I shake. God knows who'll hold it at Amherst." I didn't hold it, but did introduce her to a packed room of awed students who applauded her wildly. She read with spellbinding intensity, to the extent that one wasn't sure just what one was responding to—the poems? Or something else—the life that was all tied up with them?

Compared to Lowell, Snodgrass, and even Plath, Sexton's poetry lacked humor, exploited in a darkly romantic vein the grim disparities in things. In the late 1960's as her poems grew to my eyes more shapeless, distended and surreal, they also became dirtier and more infantile, but not more humorous. Yet humor is the saving grace of many of these letters, as when she refers to her first published work as "My (fucking) book," or gives herself two points ("Haven't killed myself for a year or over"), or questions Jon Stallworthy in England, where she is to attend a conference, about the advisability of her staying at something called the "69 Hotel": "Impossible that there should be a hotel named that. What does one do in such a hotel and being the only woman at the conference? 69 Hotel! Don't they know I have a broken hip?" Or a brilliant tour de force of a letter catalogues all the disasters which might happen to a person, and the

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inventive means she takes to avoid each one: "Lightning? wear sneakers, stay off phone. Tornado? retire to cellar to look at washing machine and interesting junk in cellar. How's that? Neurotic? You bet." This is the person one would like to have known.

The later years do not make pleasant reading. By 1970 Kayo had evidently grown so "stable" that "He is still rigid and politically repulsive. Last year he had a sign on his car that said 'Register Communists, Not Firearms'. I didn't say much but I was ashamed." She divorced him in 1973, had by then lost most of her old correspondents, hungered after God, was convinced that she would not be the object of many men's attentions but, in the single most chilling fact of this book, ended up sending in her name to a computer dating service. Her letters to her daughters become stiflingly urgent and close, with gooey nicknames draped about, "Mumble-bug" or "Dearest Joyball with a tiny bit of jellybean cheeks." Her poems rather frequently feature their heroine under the name of "Ms. Dog," surely a desperately dreary bit of improvisation and a poor tribute to the women's movement. Her death in 1974 came almost as an anti-climax. I remember hearing about it at a dinner party in Cambridge, where the only comment anybody had to make was—well, she finally did it. Our crassness, but also her overkill.

It would be nice to say that at least we can turn to the poetry and see in it a triumphant vindication of the messy chaos—perfection of the work rather than of the life, as Yeats would have it. The collected poems are due to appear next year, but my own sense is that she is already being and will come to be read less and less, her main audience a few unhappy college students, probably female ones. Except for some moments in *Love Poems* (1969) her best work comes in the metrically conservative first volume. Later on she seemed to throw away whatever modest technical accomplishment she possessed in favor of getting down the excitingly grotesque meanings. The lines have no rhythm, just lie flat on the page. Her sense of literary tradition was uninstructed, and there is almost no indication from the letters that she spent much time reading her predecessors. Her idea of a good novelist was Kurt Vonnegut, whom she persuaded to write a preface (a vulgar and complacent one it is) for *Transformations:* "He is my this-year favorite," she wrote in 1969. "Very funny. His style is so simple."

In a letter her daughter has placed at the end of this volume, though it was written five years before her suicide, Anne Sexton gave Linda Gray Sexton as deep advice as she could summon up:

> Life is not easy. It is awfully lonely. I know that. Now you too know it—wherever you are, Linda, talking to me. But I've had a good life—I wrote unhappy—but I lived to the hilt. You too, Linda—Live to the HILT!

It is the same advice Little Bilham passed on to Strether in Gloriani's garden in *The Ambassadors,* but the capitalized, exclammatory HILT! conjures up images of the sword, the dagger, the pistol. In one of her earliest poems, long before the notion became a fashionable scare-tactic

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for women to dress up dangerous in, she called herself "a possessed witch,/haunting the black air, braver at night" in a poem which concluded thus:

> I have ridden in your cart, driver,
> wave my nude arms at villages going by,
> learning the last bright routes, survivor
> where your flames still bite my thigh
> and my ribs crack where your wheels wind.
> A woman like that is not ashamed to die.
> I have been her kind.

If it looked like an exaggeration in 1959, she went on to turn it into a way of life: all in all, quite an act.

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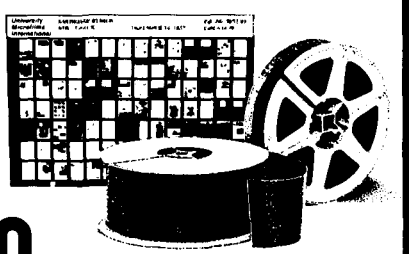

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ROBERT BUFFINGTON

Disorder and Early Sorrow[1]

LATE IN A LONG AND PROFOUNDLY IMPORTANT CAREER, Allen Tate has published a *Collected Poems*, from the mere idea of which he had heretofore fastidiously recoiled. The *Collected Poems* takes its place beside his *Essays of Four Decades* (1968) and his novel *The Fathers* (reissued this year in a revised edition)—as a monument, we could say with appropriate ceremony, but more practically for us as a live source of knowledge of our modern selves, if we are willing to undertake the difficult access.

Tate's importance must ultimately be defined in terms of his entire role as a man of letters, including, besides his works, his almost ubiquitous presence in the literary life of his century, as an editor and a counselor of editors, as a nurturer of other talents—as an untiring literary statesman. His life since 1922 or 1923 has been lived in passionate devotion to literature as an art and to the idea of a modern republic of letters: the only republic, he once wrote his close friend John Peale Bishop, that he believed in. But Tate personally wants to be remembered most, I think, for his poetry. "I have never considered myself much of a literary critic," he wrote in 1968, "but rather a writer of programmatic essays covertly eliminating kinds of poetry that I was sure I did not want to write, and perhaps uncandidly, because unconsciously, justifying what I was attempting" ("Poetry Modern and Unmodern"). Although his critical essays have given us one way of talking about his poetry, that is not an accurate description of them by any means, for they have given us a way of talking about a good deal else; but that is an indication of how Tate sees his criticism in relation to his poetry. The poetry is prior.

The story of Tate's and the other Fugitives' communal apprenticeship is a familiar one by now. Until recently Tate had been under the impression that he wrote his first poems only after attending, as the first undergraduate, one of those Nashville Saturday nights in 1921: until Radcliffe Squires turned up two poems published in the *American Poetry Magazine* of Milwaukee and written as early as 1919, during Tate's freshman year. He had forgotten those poems because, whatever the impulse behind them, he had written them before discovering among the Fugitives a compelling new motive: to write a better poem than anyone else he knew. The leader of the group, John Crowe Ransom, as Thomas Daniel Young's recent biography reveals, behind his disarming public demeanor was a fiercely competitive man. The competition has seemed to Tate (for all the cultural analyses that the Fugitives have inspired) the chief value of such a group.

In the section of early work (1919–1924) in the collection are some thirty poems not included in *The Swimmers and Other Selected Poems* (1970), some of them forgotten for years and turned up by Tate's friends Monroe Spears and Thomas Daniel Young. One source of these is a leather-bound

[1] COLLECTED POEMS, 1919–1976, by *Allen Tate*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $12.50.

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typescript titled "Parthenia and Other Poems," dated June 3, 1922, and dedicated as follows:

> To M. E. H.
> These poems, written by a young Scholar for his Lady, the author knows to be nothing, yet he has hope that the sentiment of the gift may bring to it some value.

It has survived as a memento of an unhappy affair, in the wake of which, and under a cloud of debts for charge accounts and college fees, Tate suffered a physical breakdown. His doctor, suspecting tuberculosis, sent him to the North Carolina mountains, shortly before he was to have graduated. In that isolation he concentrated his energies on poetry, exchanging poems and long letters of criticism and opinion with Donald Davidson back in Nashville, and catching up, through Hart Crane, who sent him back issues of the *Little Review,* with what had been going on just beyond the Fugitives' ken. When he returned to Vanderbilt in February, 1923, to complete his senior year, the young Scholar had begun to think of himself uncompromisingly as a poet.

He was, he says, "imitating everybody": Baudelaire, E. A. Robinson, Ernest Dowson, Corbière, James Thomson, Ezra Pound, Apollinaire, the Imagists. There are also signs of his first Master, Ransom. Some of the poems he wrote as jokes. In "Nuptials" he played with the style that reviewers of the day called "hard-boiled," capping the joke by dedicating it "To J. C. R." But all of the Fugitives took the poem very seriously, as Davidson, who thought it achieved a perfect balance between the modern and the traditional, reported by letter ("John seems to regard it as a powerful feat of arms, but raises the question as to whether the thing is *en masse,* poetry"). Tate and his roommate Ridley Wills, finding the Fugitive meetings a little too serious, produced in one night's work a high-spirited satire on both the Fugitives and Tate's nemesis Professor Edwin Mims, *The Golden Mean and Other Poems*, dedicated to the ideal of balance between the modern and the traditional. Tate naturally took responsibility for the modernist exhibitions, of which he has included a sample, titled "Tercets of the Triad."

What attitude are we to take to an important poet's apprentice work? Robert Penn Warren, who of course served an apprenticeship in the same intensely serious and competitive group, once in an interview was asked by a young poet what advice he would give to young writers. Quit, Warren answered impatiently, thinking of yourself as just a young writer. One performs as well as he can, and if he falls on his face, he falls just as flatly at twenty, as at forty.

In none of the early poems he has collected does Tate quite fall on his face. Even "Red Stains," the earliest published poem, shows that at nineteen Orley Allen Tate already knew how to get into a poem and out of it—even out of a sonnet—pretty well on his own terms. At some point in this section, perhaps in the neighborhood of "Parthenia" (1922), one realizes that the problem of how to take the poems has disappeared, at

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least temporarily. That is, one has forgotten that he is supposed to be discounting, under the head of "Early Poems," poems finished off so authoritatively as these:

> We buried you in the unremissive ground.
> I went home. Somewhere I heard the clang of a hearse.
> You are very far away, dear Lady—
> As I light this cigarette—and under an inscrutable curse.
> ("Elegy for Eugenesis")

> It is moot whether there be divinities
> As I finish this play by Webster:
> The street-cars are still running however
> And the katharsis fades in the warm water of a yawn.
> ("Horatian Epode to the Duchess of Malfi")

Like the mature poems, the early poems are public, not personal. Among them two immediate subjects appear frequently, as efficient causes: women and death. The women of one type are a simple means to general satire, like "The Flapper" or the Jenny of "Perimeters" and "Hitch Your Wagon to a Star": "Think of her as Leda, as a goddess, / Emptying a smile on Redkey, Indiana." The women of serious presence are remote, seen at sharp angles in an incomplete relationship somehow connected to the social disorder: the poems do not bring all the matter of this complex theme into clear focus.

> Some have for wits and then to midnight passed
> Felt sleep thud up the lawn on a crutch.
> Over the sky spread the efficient label of dawn
> Many dawns—spread this advertising Life
> That must go say they till life is dead.
> And I will whistle for you at the gate tomorrow
> dusk and you will come with washed odors
> in your hair, forgetting
>
> What was dancing to you then?
> We went from the high gate away
> To a black hill the other side of men
> Where one wild stag stared
> At the going day.
> ("Vision Beatific")

Death is not a subject that Tate got from the elegiac Ransom, death in Ransom's poems being one side of an eternally unresolvable dualism. Death in Tate's early poems is a very modern experience: "the embarrassing dumb show" ("For a Dead Citizen"). Death embarrasses because, rather than being set over against life, it is a part of life that calls the whole into question. Tate at this stage did not pretend to an answer. His

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questioning treatment of death had its culmination in "Death of Little Boys" (1925) and "Ode to the Confederate Dead" (1927, 1937).

I have so far not mentioned Tate's second Master, whose picture hangs beside John Ransom's on Tate's bedroom wall. In fact, I have toyed with the notion of not mentioning him once, to demonstrate if only crudely an exercise that needs to be performed at least occasionally in the understanding and appreciation of Tate's poetry.

In May, 1922, Hart Crane saw a poem of Tate's in the *Double Dealer* of New Orleans that he admired, and writing the letter that initiated their friendship, he remarked that Tate evidently had been reading T. S. Eliot. The poem was "Euthanasia":

> No more the white refulgent streets,
> Never the dry gutters of the mind,
> Shall he in hellish boredom walk
> Again, for death is not unkind.
>
> The graceless madness of her lips,
> Who was the powder-puff of life,
> Cannot rouge those cheeks nor warm
> His cold corpuscles back to strife.
>
> What did he gain? What did he lose?
> These questions for the pious dead
> Are blown from bosoms of kind souls—
> A scented sorrow, corseted!

Tate had not yet read Eliot. I do not find anything specifically Eliotic in the three stanzas. But no one was hotter on the track of modernism than Crane, and he must have caught here an affinity that would have seemed striking in 1922. Tate got Eliot's *Poems* (1920) and was amazed: "There were two great poems in that volume that seemed to do everything that I wanted to do: 'Gerontion' and 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.' There were the juxtaposition of contraries, progression by association, alternations of the plain, or 'drab' style, with rhetorical splendor" ("Poetry Modern and Unmodern"). It is a remarkable coincidence, although perhaps no more remarkable than that of two scientists' independently studying the same problem and coming to the same solution, that an expatriate scion of New England out of St. Louis and an undergraduate in Nashville more or less from Kentucky, a half generation apart, were pursuing parallel courses. It was an affinity of similar sensibilities similarly educated in their literary perceptions—self-educated in part—engaged in bringing to coherent form the same quarrel with the age of which they were part—quarrels, that is, with themselves. Whether either knew it, they were both on their way to becoming "religious poets," the greatest of their time.

How did the undergraduate in Nashville come to be so precociously

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conscious of the age, ahead of Ransom and Davidson, who both had been to France in the Great War? (Davidson wrote the "Hot Youth" on the subject of guts: "I got mine in the Army. I suppose you got yours from long residence at a frat. house,—or where else might it have been?") For anyone but a pure determinist, if there is such a being, the precise edges of any answer must dissolve into the mysteries of personhood. From his mother and her people, Tate got an image of an almost mythic order, built around places called Pleasant Hill and Chestnut Hill, in Virginia, where she told him he was born. After her death, when Tate was thirty-years-old, his father, a Kentuckian, showed him offhandedly the house where he was born, in Winchester, Kentucky. The reality of Tate's boyhood was anything but orderly. His parents were as far apart as husband and wife as their accounts of his birthplace. Between the ages of seven and ten he was kept on a predominantly liquid diet for nervous indigestion. His father's business ventures, invariably unsuccessful, moved the family several times; but his mother in her separations from her husband was even more restless, so that by the time he was eighteen he had lived—some times in houses, sometimes in hotels and boarding-houses—in Winchester and Ashland, Kentucky; Nashville; Louisville; Ashland again; Evansville, Indiana; Cincinnati; and Washington. Summers he spent following his mother to various mountain resorts or on visits to her relations in Virginia and Washington. Although not forced, like Hart Crane, to participate in his parents' quarrels, Tate as a boy was exposed at every nerve-end, like Henry James's Maisie, to the life about him, which clashed with an image he harbored of a landed eighteenth-century family and society. In the meantime he was getting, despite his nomadic life, a sound prep-school education; and when he was kept out of school by his mother, who disapproved of public schools, he had an ample supply of books.

First in Arthur Symons's translation, then at college in French, he read Baudelaire, the most significant teacher he had in common with his remarkable counterpart in London. By Baudelaire's French he was convinced permanently that "formal versification is the primary structure of poetic order, the assurance to the reader and to the poet himself that the poet is in control of the disorder both outside him and within his own mind" ("Poetry Modern and Unmodern"). And in Baudelaire's French he saw rendered for the first time what the Victorian Symons had not known enough to translate, the *fourmillante Cité*. Baudelaire's walking ghosts were among the ancestors of Eliot's Prufrock and also of young Tate's dead citizen, his flapper, and Jenny.

When Tate returned to Vanderbilt in 1923 he was Eliot's champion against the wary Ransom and Davidson. Something of what he got from Eliot can be seen in "Ode to the Confederate Dead." But before Eliot was well-known and before Tate had read him, Tate had already found the mode that served him through the twenties and into the thirties. Tate's poems have been read too often, I suspect out of critical laziness, in the shadow of Eliot's. (Even Tate's use of Dante has been used against him, as an example of Eliot's overriding influence; although he did not draw upon

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him until later, Tate first read Dante at Vanderbilt in an Italian course.) "Death of Little Boys," "Mr. Pope," "The Subway," "The Cross," "Emblems," "The Mediterranean," "Winter Mask," "Seasons of the Soul," "The Swimmers"—the rest, in fact, of Tate's major poems—can be read without any reference to Eliot. Eliot's importance for Tate is more general than has been supposed; like Ransom (whose poetry no one has accused Tate of imitating), Eliot provided him a model, friendly and at the same time avuncular, for the serious profession of letters.

Tate published his first collection, *Mr. Pope and Other Poems*, in 1928. Besides the brilliant title poem, it included "Death of Little Boys," "The Subway," and "Ode to the Confederate Dead." Although it came late in the twentieth-century poetic renaissance as that is commonly dated, it should be thought of in conjunction with such other first books as *A Boy's Will* (1913), *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), and *Harmonium* (1923). It is vastly superior to Ransom's *Poems About God* (1919), which is pre-renaissance in style.

"Death of Little Boys" was made into a prime exhibit of "obscurity" in modern poetry, a quality for which Tate's poetry generally has been infamous. Tate wished, he wrote in 1951, that he "could write poems that are not gloomily difficult" ("The Unliteral Imagination; Or, I, too, Dislike It"). But the poet's responsibility "is quite simply the reality of man's experience, not what his experience ought to be" ("To Whom Is the Poet Responsible?" 1950). Tate has taken for his responsibility the submerged reality of modern experience: what we actually feel, if we can but understand it, against what we may want to feel, or are told to feel—

> What is this conversation, now secular,
> A speech not mine yet speaking for me in
> The heaving jelly of my tribal air?
> ("Causerie")

In the thirties, in the forties, and again in the fifties, Tate found new modes for himself. Most poems, he has remarked, are written accidentally. After a picnic at Cassis and a remark by Ford Madox Ford that sent him to the *Aeneid*, he wrote that magnificent declarative lyric (many of his poems, like many of his essays, are interrogative), his best poem of the thirties, "The Mediterranean." One night during the winter of 1942–43 at Monteagle, Tennessee, he sat doodling with Yeats's trimeter beat in his head and wrote out a ten-line rhymed stanza: it became the first stanza of "Winter Mask," one of his best poems. He subsequently used the stanza-form that he had discovered to write "Seasons of the Soul," perhaps his finest work. That winter in wartime, spent at the practically empty summer resort near Sewanee where his mother used to take him on her peregrinations and where she died in 1929, with his first wife, Caroline Gordon, Robert Lowell, and Lowell's first wife, Jean Stafford, has been the richest brief period of his poetic career. From the same "seizure," as he has called it, issued his beautiful translation of *Pervigilium Veneris*, "The

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Vigil of Venus," with its refrain "Tomorrow may loveless, may lover tomorrow make love."

In the early fifties, living in Minneapolis, he undertook a seven-part sequence in *terza rima*, an exercise of the literal imagination. He completed three poems: "The Maimed Man," "The Swimmers," and "The Buried Lake." "The Swimmers" could be the best *terza rima* written in English, although I can imagine the master Ransom asking, as he once asked of a poem of Hardy's that he admired, whether Tate isn't putting an undue strain on his native tongue.

All of the poems in the book are dated and within sections are mostly in chronological order. "There is only one thing in life to me," Tate wrote Davidson in 1923, "and that is the continual possibility of pursuing literature as an art." How bravely he has lived up to that declaration. The *Collected Poems* unfolds the pursuit and records the victories.

To Our Readers

A new book by one of the editors of THE HUDSON REVIEW has just been published. In accordance with our policy, the book will not be reviewed in these pages, but is listed below for the interest of our readers:

HAYDEN CARRUTH: *Brothers, I Loved You All.* Sheep Meadow Press, 145 Central Park West, New York, N.Y. 10023. $7.95; $3.95 paperback.

We are pleased to note that Jorge Guillén, first recipient (1976) of The Bennett Award, a literary prize given by this Review, has since then been awarded the following major literary honors: the Cervantes Prize (Spain and Latin America), the Lincei Prize (Italy), and the Alfonso Reyes Prize (Mexico).

The moratorium on reading unsolicited manuscripts, as announced in our Spring 1978 issue, has been extended from September 1 to October 1.

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